

SEXUALITY

Joseph Bristow



2nd
edition



the NEW CRITICAL IDIOM



SEXUALITY

Theories of sexuality and desire are commonly used in literary and cultural studies. In this illuminating study Joseph Bristow introduces readers to the fundamental critical debates surrounding the topic.

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- a new preface summarizing changes in the field since the first edition
- a new glossary, annotated further reading section and bibliography.

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Joseph Bristow is Professor of English at the University of California, Los Angeles. His recent books include *Oscar Wilde and Modern Culture: The Making of a Legend* (2008) and *The Wilde Archive: Traditions, Histories, Resources* (2011). He is an editor of the *Journal of Victorian Culture* (Routledge).

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SERIES EDITOR: JOHN DRAKAKIS, UNIVERSITY OF STIRLING

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SEXUALITY

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CONTENTS

<i>Series editor's preface</i>	vi
<i>Preface to the first edition</i>	vii
<i>Preface to the second edition</i>	viii
Introduction	1
1 Sexological types	12
Sexual classifications	12
Feminist contentions	43
Consuming passions	52
2 Psychoanalytic drives	57
Freud's complexes	57
Lacan's orders	76
Feminist interventions	89
3 Libidinal economies	105
(De)generating pleasures	105
Pornographic materials	133
4 Discursive desires	151
Foucault's bodies	151
Foucault's exclusions	169
Foucault's followers	177
5 Diverse eroticisms	197
Queer (non)identities	197
Global sexualities	215
<i>Glossary</i>	223
<i>Bibliography</i>	233
<i>Further reading</i>	241
<i>Index</i>	243

SERIES EDITOR'S PREFACE

The New Critical Idiom is a series of introductory books which seeks to extend the lexicon of literary terms, in order to address the radical changes which have taken place in the study of literature during the last decades of the twentieth century. The aim is to provide clear, well-illustrated accounts of the full range of terminology currently in use, and to evolve histories of its changing usage.

The current state of the discipline of literary studies is one where there is considerable debate concerning basic questions of terminology. This involves, among other things, the boundaries which distinguish the literary from the non-literary; the position of literature within the larger sphere of culture; the relationship between literatures of different cultures; and questions concerning the relation of literary to other cultural forms within the context of interdisciplinary studies.

It is clear that the field of literary criticism and theory is a dynamic and heterogeneous one. The present need is for individual volumes on terms which combine clarity of exposition with an adventurousness of perspective and a breadth of application. Each volume will contain as part of its apparatus some indication of the direction in which the definition of particular terms is likely to move, as well as expanding the disciplinary boundaries within which some of these terms have been traditionally contained. This will involve some re-situation of terms within the larger field of cultural representation, and will introduce examples from the area of film and the modern media in addition to examples from a variety of literary texts.

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

Sexuality aims to provide a clear and concise introduction to the meanings and myths attached to a key critical term. In covering a wide range of theoretical writings, I have tried to give a fair and balanced representation of contending intellectual positions. Given the strict limits on space, the discussion has been obliged to condense a great many complex points in the most direct manner possible. So that readers may gain further insights into this diverse field, parenthetical references indicate noteworthy secondary sources. Wherever possible, I have explained cultural allusions that might be unfamiliar to some readers. Dates of birth and death have been provided for the large number of historical figures mentioned in the discussion.

This book was completed while I held a Senior External Research Fellowship at the Stanford Humanities Center during 1995–96. The Director of the Center, Keith Baker, together with the administrative staff – Sue Dambrau, Gwen Lorraine and Susan Sebbard – made me feel particularly welcome during my stay. Research for this study was assisted by the help I received from the staffs of both the Cecil H. Green Library and the J. Henry Meyer Memorial Library at Stanford. Two fellows at the Center – Eric Oberle and James I. Porter – kindly pointed me in the direction of sources I would not otherwise have found. Richard W. Schoch, a Whiting Fellow at the Center, offered warm and sustaining friendship during the writing process. The Associate Director of the Center, Susan Dunn, showed great generosity in loaning me personal copies of books that were proving hard to obtain while I was drawing this project to a close. Last but by no means least, Talia Rodgers has been an extremely patient and encouraging editor, as has the series editor, John Drakakis. My thanks go to all of these colleagues.

Stanford University
May 1996

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

In this second edition of *Sexuality*, I have taken the opportunity to update references, correct errors and emend several formulations in the original version of this book, which was published in early 1997. What is more, I have added a fifth chapter entitled 'Diverse eroticisms' that takes into account noteworthy developments in thinking about the category of sexuality in relation to the emergence of queer theory and the rise of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) studies, especially in connection with challenges to 'normative' practices of desire. Since many current discussions of sexuality explore divergent types of embodiment, the fifth chapter looks at several important developments within queer thought, particularly in connection with debates about corporeality, kinship and intimacy. The concluding section of this second edition focuses attention on the ways in which scholars have recently approached the interconnections between sexuality, globalization and neoliberalism in different parts of the world, notably China, Indonesia and the Philippines.

In line with more recent titles in the New Critical Idiom series, this second edition contains a fairly comprehensive glossary of more than fifty terms that relate to the debates explored in my five chapters. While some of the terms listed in the glossary may appear self-evident (e.g. heterosexual and homosexual), these have been included so that readers can grasp their emergence, usage and etymology. Moreover, I have explained the specifically sexual use of some of these otherwise well-known terms because they might on occasion be unfamiliar to readers outside the English-speaking world. A list of further reading appears after the bibliography. The additional titles mentioned here include recent critical studies that address emergent areas of inquiry, deal with broad topics or take largely theoretical approaches to the study of sexuality in the humanities and social sciences. (In the bibliography, I have supplied two dates for some of the titles; the first

date refers to the edition I have used, while the second date identifies the original date of publication.)

Some readers of the first edition mentioned that they were surprised to see that *Sexuality* does not address pressing matters such as sexual harassment and the sexual abuse of children, both of which continue to generate urgent political debate. Such significant questions relating to public health, public policy and social welfare lie beyond the scope of the present study. Moreover, *Sexuality* does not engage with scientific inquiries into anatomy, evolutionary theory, genetics, heredity or advances in medical knowledge with regard to the mental and physiological conditions in which sexual desire is cognized, embodied or represented. Instead, as a work placed within the New Critical Idiom series, the five chapters set out to trace the historical origins, underlying assumptions and theoretical deployments of sexuality as a critical term that has enjoyed increasing prominence within the humanities and social sciences.

The opening chapters consider the emergence of sexuality as a category in the late nineteenth-century field of sexology and the near-contemporary discipline of psychoanalysis. Many of the remaining materials on sexuality discussed in this book relate to widely debated areas of critical, feminist, lesbian and gay, and queer theory that have many of their origins in the 1960s and have gained prominence in the scholarly world since the 1980s and 1990s. These theoretical inquiries, which span the Victorian *fin de siècle* and the opening decade of the twenty-first century, provide divergent frameworks for imagining what sexuality might be – whether as an unruly set of drives, forces or energies that have been subject to forms of cultural, social and psychological repression; an array of erotic identifications that involve complex psychical displacements, projections and fetishisms; a set of discursive practices that support and/or subvert dominant cultural and political ideals; a category that draws attention to the ways in which our bodies are erotically orientated in space and time; and a surplus energy that capitalism both produces and seeks to regulate or harness. As a highly manipulated critical term, sexuality can stand for some or all of these things. But regardless of the conclusions that we may draw about the

meaning of this contested word, the fact is that sexuality remains central to present-day comprehensions of the ways in which experiences and expressions of eroticism are supposed to define aspects – if not the very core – of our subjectivities.

The first edition of *Sexuality* was published at the moment I moved permanently from England to the United States to take up a position at the University of California, Los Angeles. During the past fourteen years, I have benefited greatly from the intellectual resources of UCLA, especially its remarkable library system. It has been my good fortune to work closely with several graduate students who have an established interest in LGBT studies, in particular, and sexuality studies, in general. My thanks must go to Dustin Friedman, Patrick Keilty and Daniel Williford for very productive discussions about recent scholarship in the field. For many years, H.N. Lukes has generously shared thoughts about her researches on psychoanalysis and queer sexual desire. Research for this second edition was completed midway through a year-long Sawyer seminar series, 'Homosexualities, from Antiquity to the Present', which was generously funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Planning for this seminar, which I directed, ensured that I learned much from my colleagues on the programming committee: Lowell Gallagher, Grace Kyungwon Hong, Arthur L. Little, Amy Richlin and Juliet Williams. Robert G. Diaz, the Mellon postdoctoral fellow attached to this programme, generously shared his insights into current developments in queer thought. I am grateful, too, to Sue-Ellen Case for generously discussing her contributions to recent debates within LGBT studies and queer theory. All of these colleagues have broadened my understanding of trends, shifts and transformations in an area of inquiry that is filled with intellectual energy, as well as many sharp divisions of opinion.

Since *Sexuality* was originally presented in British English, this second edition maintains its conventions of spelling and punctuation.

My thanks must go to Emma Nugent at Routledge for the encouragement she gave me while I was completing the revision of this study.

During the past decade, my life has gone through several welcome changes that have made me rethink some of my earlier

assumptions about affection, intimacy and desire. My partner, Blaine Ashton Noblett, has taught me many things in this regard. And, last but not least, there are our long-hair dachshunds, Leo and Sabrina, who were never far from me when I completed my work on this second edition.

Los Angeles
March 2010

INTRODUCTION

What is sexuality? To this blunt question, the answer would seem clear enough. Sexuality is surely connected with sex. But if we find ourselves pressed to define what is meant by sex, then the situation becomes somewhat more complicated. In the English language, the word sex is certainly ambiguous. A sign with various connotations, sex refers not only to sexual activity (*to have sex*), it also marks the distinction between male and female anatomy (*to have a sex*). So it would perhaps be wise to think twice about the ways in which sexuality might be implicated in these distinct frameworks of understanding. Is sexuality supposed to designate sexual desire? Or does it refer instead to one's sexed being? If we find ourselves answering yes to both enquiries, then sexuality would appear to embrace ideas about pleasure *and* physiology, fantasy *and* anatomy. On reflection, then, sexuality emerges as a term that defines both internal and external phenomena, and both the realm of the psyche and the material world. Given the equivocal meaning of sex, one might suggest that sexuality occupies a place where sexed bodies (in all their shapes and sizes) and sexual desires (in all their multifariousness) intersect only to separate. Looked at from this dual perspective, there are many kinds of

sexed body and sexual desire inhabiting sexuality. Small wonder this immensely significant term has for decades generated a huge amount of discussion from conflicting critical viewpoints.

Given the diverse theoretical approaches to sexuality, this introductory guide outlines the major modern debates about eroticism, all the way from late-Victorian sexology to twenty-first-century queer theory. Each chapter in turn shows why there is still little agreement among leading theorists on the most appropriate method for interpreting sexual desire. While some commentators would argue that sexuality articulates a fundamental human need, others would recommend that we examine closely how such an assumption arose in the first place. Contending arguments have been made that sexuality needs to be understood in relation to widely varying phenomena, from physiological drives to structures of language. The fact that it remains hard to obtain consensus on what sexuality is – or, for that matter, should be – prompts a great many urgent questions. Why is it that the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have witnessed an unending fascination with distinctive types of erotic behaviour? What are critics seeking to discover when devising elaborate theoretical models to understand sex? And why have modern thinkers reached such contradictory conclusions about the meaning of sexuality in our everyday lives?

To get to grips with these fundamental issues, we could do well to begin by considering how, why and when sexuality originally gained legitimacy as a critical category. Sexuality is a comparatively new term. The word became common currency in late nineteenth-century Europe and America when anthropological, scientific and sociological studies of sex were flourishing as never before. In its earliest scientific usage, sexuality defined the meanings of human eroticism, and when marked by a prefix – such as ‘bi’, ‘hetero’ or ‘homo’ – the word came to describe types of person who embodied particular desires. In previous decades, however, the label sexuality was used somewhat differently, and it is worth pondering on briefly the rather unexpected contexts in which sexuality appears at these earlier times.

If you dip into the *Oxford English Dictionary*, you will see that the first recorded use of sexuality appears in 1836. The word

turns up in an edition of the collected works of eighteenth-century English poet, William Cowper (1731–1800). Cowper's editor notes that this eminent writer 'built his poem' titled 'The Lives of Plants' upon 'their sexuality'. The *OED* suggests in this editorial commentary that sexuality means 'the quality of being sexual or having sex'. Yet 'having sex' in this particular instance refers primarily to botany. This example alone plainly shows that sexuality has not always belonged to an exclusively human domain.

A slightly later usage of sexuality may also strike us as a little surprising. The *OED* lists its third definition of the word in a quite familiar manner, as 'recognition of or preoccupation with what is sexual'. Yet here, too, the example employed to support this definition presents 'what is sexual' in an uncommon way. The example in question comes from the authorial Preface to *Yeast: A Problem* (1851), a polemical Condition-of-England novel by English writer, Charles Kingsley (1819–75): 'Paradise and hell ... as grossly material as Mahomet's, without the honest thorough-going sexuality, which you thought made his notion logical and consistent'. This sentence may well encourage us to ask why Kingsley should associate sexuality with argumentative rationality. Rarely, if ever, in the post-Victorian era has sex been thought to underpin the cognitive powers of the mind. To the contrary, some theorists are convinced that sexuality opposes reason because it exerts a hydraulic force which threatens to rise up and subvert the logical intellect.

If these two examples from the *OED* have any value, then it is to confirm that the contemporary perspectives from which we view sexuality have for the most part arisen in the past century – although there are one or two exceptions to the rule. The *Supplement* to the *OED*, for example, notes that the English poet and essayist Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834) employed the term bisexuality as early as 1804, in *Aids to Reflection*, where he comments on 'the very old tradition of the *homo androgynous*, that is, that original man ... was bi-sexual'. To Coleridge, 'bisexual' evidently means containing both sexes in one body. Although this usage is not completely outmoded today, it is definitely not the same as the modern view that bisexuality means attraction to both men and women. Only by the 1890s had sexuality and its

variant prefixed forms become associated with types of sexual person and kinds of erotic attraction. The *Supplement* to the *OED* records that both the words heterosexuality and homosexuality first entered the English language in an 1892 translation of the well-known study, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, by the Austrian sex researcher, Richard von Krafft-Ebing (1840–1902). One of Krafft-Ebing's earliest and most attentive readers, John Addington Symonds (1840–93), observed in 1891 that 'the adjective *homosexual*, though ill-compounded of a Greek and a Latin word, is useful, and has been adopted by medical writers on this topic' (though, notably, he thought perhaps that the epithet '*Unisexual*' would have been better) (Symonds 1896 [1891]: 44). Thereafter, it took some time before the etymological hybrids, hetero- and homosexuality, circulated widely among the population; it is clear that when they were generally acknowledged they were perceived as the only sexual options. (It is important to note that bisexuality tended to disappear from public view, since it was consigned to specialist medical textbooks and psychoanalytic writings.) This fact becomes plain in a frequently cited episode in *My Father and Myself* (1992 [1968]) by English novelist J.R. Ackerley (1896–1967). In this distinguished memoir, Ackerley recalls his bafflement at being asked by a friend shortly after the First World War (1914–18): 'Are you a homo or a hetero?' 'I had', writes Ackerley, 'never heard either term before' (Ackerley 1992: 117). But, as Ackerley quickly points out, for him 'there seemed only one answer' to this question. Even if he 'did not care for the word "homosexual" or any label', Ackerley claims that the term now enabled him to discern exactly where he stood on 'the sexual map'. As a result, he remained 'proud' of 'his place on it' (Ackerley 1992: 118).

Ackerley's remarks certainly point to a curious tension between sexual naming and sexual being, revealing the power of the term homosexual to grant a coherent place in the cultural order, while at the same time expressing some discontent at having one's erotic preference attached to a specific classification. This tension suggests that there is always likely to be a conspicuous gap between the experience of eroticism and the category used to designate that experience.

This issue has been explored by several influential historians of sexuality. Having devoted much of his research to examining the recent emergence of the word sexuality in its current sense, Jeffrey Weeks remarks that it is vital not to forget that ‘what we define as “sexuality” is an historical construction’ (Weeks 1986: 15). By warning us against the belief that sexuality refers to an essentially human quality known through all time, Weeks claims that sexuality is a “‘fictional unity”, that once did not exist, and at some time in the future may not exist again’. In other words, the term sexuality is historically contingent, coming to prominence at a time when detailed attention was increasingly turned to classifying, determining and even producing assorted sexual desires. Consequently, he questions whether sexuality is an entirely suitable expression for discussing the erotic lives of cultures that preceded the late-Victorian moment when sexuality earned its current name.

In a similar spirit, David M. Halperin sounds a warning note against employing the term homosexuality to describe erotic activity between men in Ancient Greece. Observing that homosexuality is a distinctly modern construction, Halperin declares: ‘It may well be that homosexuality has no history of its own outside the West or much before the beginning of our century’ (Halperin 1990: 18). Like many cultural historians, Halperin is highly sensitive to the critical hazards involved in using such a loaded modern idiom. Since homosexuality has often been seen as the dissident antithesis to normative heterosexual desire, the term may not be altogether germane to understanding how past societies conceptualized erotic relations between persons of the same sex. Like Weeks, Halperin advances the view that sexuality needs to be understood first and foremost in its own specific historical context because the word itself might only have limited analytical reach if applied to sexual arrangements before the twentieth century.

In order to illustrate the rise of sexuality as a peculiarly modern phenomenon, Chapter 1 examines the development of sexology, in particular from the 1860s through to the early twentieth century. Sexology was the science that sought to know the name and nature of diverse desires and sexual types, and the comprehensive vocabulary it created retains its influence to this day. Not only

did sexology bring the figures of the bisexual, homosexual and heterosexual to public attention, it also investigated perverse behaviours, including sadism and masochism. Sexological writings often went to inordinate lengths to classify sexual perversions, compiling case histories that featured men and women making frank and startling disclosures about their erotic desires. Countless volumes of this kind provided an imposing, if at times inflexible, system of terms for describing a broad range of sexual types and practices. But such works did not always celebrate the phenomena they investigated. Since early sexology often leant heavily on medical science, it had a marked tendency to codify certain sexual behaviours as categories of disease. It would take many decades before sexology decisively shifted its emphasis away from pathologizing styles of sexual conduct. By comparison, modern scientific inquiries in the sexological tradition often try to refrain from presenting dissident desires as illnesses. Yet despite their liberal-minded gestures, books of this kind still tend to follow a pattern of research established by their Victorian ancestors. Time and again, they seek to typologize an astounding range of erotic phenomena, often taking pains to identify norms against which sexual performance can be measured. The same is largely true of popular works that offer sexual advice. Authors of contemporary guides on sex often focus on developing tried and tested techniques that will lead to orgasm: an event that sexologists almost always concur is the ultimate aim of sexuality. Chapter 1 explains that, no matter how non-judgemental current sexological research might have become, the span of works that fall within its scope seldom does more than quantify forms of sexual stimulation and classify sorts of sexual desire. Despite its taxonomic zeal to expand our knowledge of eroticism, sexology unfortunately has limited explanatory power when investigating all the different sexual identities and behaviours it seeks to evaluate.

If, since the turn of the twentieth century, one field of knowledge has more than any other taken our understanding of sexuality well beyond sexology, then it is surely psychoanalysis. That is why Chapter 2 first considers the researches of Sigmund Freud (1859–1939) into the unconscious, revealing how hard he strived (and sometimes failed) to divorce his analytic methods from those

of nineteenth-century hereditarian science, the field of inquiry that fascinated the earlier generation of sexologists. Once I have explained the powerful influence of Freud's Oedipus and castration complexes, my discussion turns to the intricate range of critical terms devised by his successor, Jacques Lacan (1901–81). By locating desire within the field of signification, Lacan's work at last disengaged psychoanalysis from its scientific heritage. In many respects, Lacan's work completes one of the main tasks begun by Freud: to dissociate eroticism from biological mechanisms. Psychoanalysis was the first body of theory to produce a detailed account of why sexuality must be understood separately from reproduction. In one of the clearest guides to psychoanalytic thought, Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis examine why sexual desire does not conform to a biological instinct that drives human beings towards perpetuating the species:

If one sets out with the commonly held view that defines sexuality as instinct, in the sense of a pre-determined behaviour typifying the species and having a relatively fixed *object* (partner of the opposite sex) and *aim* (union of the genital organs in coitus), it soon becomes apparent that this approach can only provide a very inadequate account of the facts that emerge as much from direct observation as from analysis.

(Laplanche and Pontalis 1973: 419)

By forcing attention on why sexuality is not necessarily geared to reproductive ends, psychoanalysis develops models that trace the origins of erotic pleasure back to infancy. In theorizing how human beings establish specific sexual identifications, Freud and, subsequently, Lacan reveal that the organization of the sexual drives starts the moment we enter the world. According to psychoanalysis, the early development of the erogenous zones bears a psychic imprint that persists throughout adulthood. Such is the initial impression made by sexuality that psychoanalysis believes it can sometimes prove hard for adults to manage their earliest and thus most insistent unconscious desires.

In the name of upholding these leading ideas, Freud identified the two interdependent structures he called the Oedipus and

castration complexes. Similarly, Lacan argued that sexuality was structured around the primary symbol of cultural authority he named the phallus. Both writers have gained notoriety for developing what undeniably are paradigms that take the centrality of the anatomical penis, the psychology of penis-envy, and the symbolic power of the phallus entirely for granted. Psychoanalytic phallocentrism would become the subject of intense debate among feminists, both in the late 1920s and early 1930s and again from the late 1960s onwards. The closing section of Chapter 2 considers a range of differing feminist standpoints on the penis and the phallus that absorb respectively Freudian and Lacanian theory. Whereas some feminists claim that this complex body of research is largely a symptom of patriarchal dominance, others argue that psychoanalysis provides significant clues about both the cultural and psychic mechanisms that assist in perpetuating sexual inequality in the West.

One of the main lessons of psychoanalysis is that sexuality comprises turbulent, if not destructive, drives whose early formation can at times prove impossible to eradicate in adult life. Freud's belief that the conflicted libido was caught in a life-and-death struggle would shape much subsequent discussion about the volatile condition of eroticism. Beginning with Freud's powerful theory of the death drive, Chapter 3 draws together two notable debates that focus on sexuality as a seemingly boundless source of impulsive energy caught within a dynamic of creation and destruction. The first part of the discussion looks at the work of several avant-garde theorists – including Georges Bataille (1897–1962), Gilles Deleuze (1930–95) and Félix Guattari (1930–92) – who have tried to unravel why sexuality violently oscillates between life and death. The second part of Chapter 3 reveals how this fraught discussion about the life-giving and death-dealing aspects of desire appear most vividly in modern feminist debates about pornography. Undoubtedly, pornography continues to divide feminist opinion about the injurious or emancipating effects of erotic desire. On the one hand, many radical feminist campaigners against pornography claim that it leads time and again to violent sexual crimes, and should therefore be legally called to account for the serious damage it causes. On the other

hand, libertarian feminists eager to combat punitive state censorship argue that there are affirmative aspects to pornography. They believe that some types of graphic sexual representation provide the possibility for women to explore and emancipate desires otherwise suppressed in a patriarchal society.

Yet this widespread emphasis on how sexuality either represses or frees sexual desire strikes French social theorist Michel Foucault (1926–84) as nothing more than a means through which power has been organized in Western society. In his influential introductory volume to *The History of Sexuality* (1976–84), Foucault prompts us to contemplate the historical circumstances that shape some of the leading claims made by psychoanalysts and philosophers about the explosive condition of eroticism. Chapter 4 examines the distinctive methods Foucault employs to demystify sexuality as a critical category. By concentrating on how power-laden discourses construct desire, he scrutinizes the conceptual regimes that have led many thinkers, from Freud to contemporary feminists, to much the same conclusion: namely, that tempestuous sexual desires are inevitably trapped within a system of suppression and liberation. Repeatedly, Foucault explores the cultural dynamics that have persuaded the modern epoch to believe that sex ‘has become more important than our soul, more important almost than our life’ (Foucault 1977c: 156). So powerful is this idea, he states, that one is led to think that we should ‘exchange life in its entirety for sex’. What was it, Foucault asks, that brought many twentieth-century intellectuals to agree that ‘[s]ex is worth dying for’?

Acutely conscious of how powerful concepts such as sexuality come to dominate our lives, Foucault examines the political fabrication of influential beliefs which profess that erotic behaviours, identities and styles are fundamental to human existence. In the process, Foucault constantly looks at how sexuality emerged as an intelligible category whose widespread acceptance has played a crucial role in regulating the social order. Although on occasion strongly criticized for treating eroticism as if it were separate from gender, Foucault has none the less inspired a later generation of feminist and queer theorists to confront the cultural interests served by the meanings ascribed to sexual desire. In this regard,

critics such as Judith Butler, Gayle Rubin and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1950–2009) have paid close attention to the troublesome ways in which modern society has been remarkably willing to accept essentialist definitions of what it means to be male or female, masculine or feminine, heterosexual or homosexual. Their work stands at the forefront of a vibrant series of critical explorations that reveal why we need to denaturalize the essentialist presumptions about desire that have governed modern approaches to erotic identities and practices.

The final chapter, 'Diverse eroticisms', opens by exploring the uneven manner in which the connected, but at times distinctive, fields of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) studies and queer theory alternately uphold or destabilize concepts of sexual identity. I pay attention to the development of distinctive bisexual and transgender accounts of sexuality, particularly in relation to contending understandings of sexual embodiment, identification and orientation. I look, too, at the uncompromising manner in which queer thought has contested what has been increasingly described as heteronormative culture, especially the belief that intimacy should solely involve privatized monogamy in the name of outlawing alternative forms of sexual sociability in public spaces. This chapter dwells on some of the competing queer viewpoints on the pros and cons of same-sex marriage, which has become one of the most politicized issues in the public discussion of sexuality in parts of the West. Among theorists of sexuality, one of the main questions arising from the controversies attending same-sex marriage is whether it involves capitulation to heteronormative values or holds out the promise of transforming the institution of marriage itself.

The final section of Chapter 5, which expands beyond the Western context where sexuality originated as a categorical term, considers a number of locations, including China and Indonesia, where we can see the complicated ways in which modern ideas of sexual identity have circulated in contradictory ways through processes of globalization. Anthropological research, in particular, has proved highly attentive to the transformations that occur when local and national communities outside the West interact with the modern sexual identities that they encounter through

international mass media. In each instance, we see the manner in which types of sexuality – most notably, same-sex desire – is understood in these divergent Asian contexts. As their horizons continue to broaden around the world, terms such as ‘lesbian’ and ‘gay’ continue to undergo considerable changes in meaning, in ways that combine local and global elements. This body of research therefore shows that processes of globalization do not necessarily involve the duplication or imposition of Western expressions of sexuality in a colonizing manner.

1

SEXOLOGICAL TYPES

SEXUAL CLASSIFICATIONS

Enter any major bookstore in the industrialized world and you are likely to find several shelves (if not more) devoted to studies of sexual behaviour. Such books might be found in the psychology section but the chances are they will be grouped together under a more specialized heading: sexology. Here you will discover a range of works, including updated editions of Alex Comfort's *The Joy of Sex* (1972), that give popular advice on sexual techniques for same-sex and other-sex partnerships. Especially in the 1960s, the number of 'how to' manuals offering guidance on sexual practices and the improvement of sexual pleasure proliferated as never before. Such writings have been popular since at least the time of *Married Love: A New Contribution to the Solution of Sex Difficulties* (1918) by Marie Stopes (1880–1958). This best-selling book was among the first to broaden common knowledge of human sexual potential, and it remains an open question whether such works are ultimately liberating or oppressive in their repeated insistence that sexual satisfaction is a fundamental human need. Similar kinds of guidance on sexual matters circulate

perpetually in the mass media, from advice columns in magazines aimed at young people to live 'adult' radio talk-shows. Given the ample opportunities that now exist to obtain information about many aspects of eroticism, it is perhaps hard to appreciate how dangerous this kind of knowledge was often thought to be when sexology – the science of sexuality – first made its appearance in the late nineteenth century.

According to Janice Irvine, sexology currently serves as 'an umbrella term denoting the activity of a multidisciplinary group of researchers, clinicians, and educators concerned with sexuality' (Irvine 1990: 2). These days, conferences devoted to sexology bring together a vast range of people with very different skills, from promoters of safer sex to medical doctors working in genitourological clinics. But this was not always the case. Sexology was first associated with the controversial work of scientists examining aspects of sexual disease. Known in German as *Sexualwissenschaft*, the word sexology is attributed to the German physician, historian and sex researcher Iwan Bloch (1872–1922), among whose works is a rather zany but none the less fascinating study of the sexual habits of the English (published 1901–3). Sexology initially designated a science that developed an elaborate descriptive system to classify a striking range of sexual types of person (bisexual, heterosexual, homosexual and their variants) and forms of sexual desire (fetishism, masochism, sadism, among them). Bloch's *The Sexual Life of Our Time* (1908) is one of several prominent works that sought to provide a distinctly scientific explanation of various sexual phenomena. Yet, like many such studies that drew on scientific authority to uphold its claims, his work met with considerable hostility in many quarters of society. So great was the mismatch between the scientific intent and the moralistic reception of many sexological texts from the 1880s through to the 1920s, it would be fair to claim these weighty tomes drove at the centre of a major anxiety in Western culture. For there was a constant struggle among those who saw themselves as respectable people to hide what sexology, in all its scientific authority, was determined to uncover.

It was certainly for this reason that copies of one of the most detailed sexological studies, *Sexual Inversion* (1897), written by

Havelock Ellis (1859–1939) in cooperation with critic and poet John Addington Symonds, led to the arrest of a London bookseller who sold a copy to an undercover policeman in 1898. This was hardly an auspicious time to bring before the world an array of case studies that revealed complex patterns of same-sex desire. It was, after all, only three years after the Irish author Oscar Wilde (1854–1900) had been notoriously vilified in the press, and subsequently sent to serve a prison sentence of two years for committing ‘gross indecency’ with other men. Such ‘gross’ homosexual acts were outlawed – both in public and in private – by the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act. Never since the day of its seizure has Ellis’s liberal-minded exploration of homosexuality ever been published again in Britain – a sign, I think, of the severe prohibition on serious public debate about same-sex desire in a country that only partly decriminalized male homosexuality, first in 1967 and again in 1994. (In the United Kingdom, it remains the case there is still not full legal equality for lesbians and gay men. Although the Civil Partners Act [2004] grants same-sex couples the same rights as heterosexual married partners, it still does not recognize same-sex couples as married. By 2006, however, the provisions of the Equality Act have meant that it is illegal to withhold the provision of goods, facilities, services, education and public functions on the basis of a person’s sexual orientation.)

Sexological writings have been renowned for making discoveries about sexual behaviour that many of the more conservative sections of modern society would prefer not to hear. In the mid-century, for example, the first Kinsey Report, *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male* (1948), brought together an imposing mass of statistical detail to show that 37 per cent of the adult male population in the United States had achieved orgasm through homosexual contact. Such data flew in the face of what had by that time become a virulently homophobic American culture. Several decades later, the appearance of *The Hite Report: A Nationwide Study of Female Sexuality* (1976) caused a sensation when it divulged that most American women did not reach orgasm through heterosexual intercourse – a point many earlier sexological works that did not become bestsellers also took pains

to note. Newspapers, women's magazines, as well as specialized academic periodicals were quick to respond to Shere Hite's findings. Sexological works of this kind are a curiosity because they have increasingly attracted popular attention, even though they rally huge quantities of information that most people, unless trained in statistical analysis, could not possibly compute. (Social scientists have pointed out that Hite's research methods were highly questionable.) Presented as monumental 'Reports', these works seek to give an official stamp of approval to the disclosure of unpalatable sexual truths that society often is at first reluctant to accept. In many ways, the bulk and weight of such surveys gives the definite impression that, if researchers keep amassing ever-increasing quantities of data, then the more they will be able to know about it.

Since its inception, sexology has left modern society with a contradictory legacy. On the one hand, it has played a major role in enabling sex to be debated more widely and seriously at all levels of society, at times providing useful technical advice on how to solve sexual problems at both the emotional and physical level. On the other hand, sexology often remains worryingly insensitive to the historical contingency of the scientific methods it employs to estimate sexual adequacy or inadequacy, deviancy or normativity. Time and again, one finds sexological writings – all the way from the 1890s to the present day – seeking to produce some everlasting truth about the sexual capacity of human beings. Such works are habitually filled with deceptive ideas about what is supposed to constitute average performance, in terms of frequency and intensity of erotic sensation, implying there is a common standard against which our sexualities might be measured. Sexological writings are frequently so pre-occupied with the quantification of data regarding sexual behaviours and functions that they rarely pause to consider how or why sexuality might resist the structures of categorization that sexual science multiplies at an exponential rate.

One only has to look at a mightily compendious work such as *The Social Organization of Sexuality*, published in 1994, to see the confidence with which social scientists present their statistical evidence as 'accurate information'. Although the writers insist

that theirs is not an ethical task to make 'judgements about what people "should" do sexually', they assume that sexuality is a perfectly recognizable category that subsumes all forms of 'sexual conduct' (Laumann *et al.* 1994: xxx–xxxi, 31). Assuming that sexuality means sexual activity, they group facts under headings such as frequency of sexual partners, sexually transmitted infections, sex and fertility, and normative orientations towards sexuality. Hardly ever do they question the biases that have for more than a century been inscribed in their methods for organizing this material. So it remains difficult for their readers to gain insights into the cultural conditions and ideological pressures that gave rise to the idea of sexuality in the first place.

The critic who has produced the most incisive accounts of the sexological tradition is Leonore Tiefer, who has extensive professional experience in genito-urological medical practice. Closely acquainted with the research of Alfred C. Kinsey (1894–1956) and his heirs, Tiefer complains that studies of this kind repeatedly fail to identify exactly what might plausibly fall within the field of analysis:

The most basic, and also most difficult, aspect of studying sexuality is defining the subject-matter. What is to be included? How much of the body is relevant? How much of the life span? Is sexuality an individual dimension or a dimension of a relationship? Which behaviours, thoughts, or feelings qualify as sexual – an unreturned glance? any hug? daydreams about celebrities? fearful memories of abuse? When can we use similar language for animals and people, if at all?

(Tiefer 1995: 20)

Tiefer's call is for modern sexology to deliberate carefully about the assumptions, biases and downright prejudices it has inherited from a highly developed tradition of research that seldom interrogates the limits to what might or might not be construed as sexual. Her point is that the models often employed by sexologists may well be inappropriate to the phenomena they are attempting to explain. She notes how sociologists John Gagnon and William Simon, in *Sexual Conduct: The Social Sources of Human Sexuality* (1973), adopted 'the metaphor of dramatic scripts to

draw our attention to learned, planned, external sources'. The trouble is that such metaphors, like the common usages of 'drive' and 'instinct' to describe sexuality, 'direct the attention of researchers, scholars, and readers to distinct possibilities' (Tiefer 1995: 20–21). Viewed as 'innate', the sexual 'drive' would seem to follow a path to a specific goal, depending on external stimuli. In using such loaded terms, Gagnon and Simon's *Sexual Conduct* does not take pains to scrutinize the assumptions that underwrite them. Tiefer argues that countless studies of this kind remain unaware of the mismatch between the theoretical model in place and the sexual phenomenon under discussion. In her view, this type of disparity was most astounding when one recalls the battles that took place in the American Psychiatric Association during 1973. During that year, concerted efforts were made to declassify homosexuality as a mental disorder. As Tiefer says, the normality or abnormality of a particular sexual behaviour, identity or style depends largely on the interpretative lens through which it is observed.

To amplify some of these general remarks, I shall first of all explore some of the more striking problems that beset a handful of notable early works of sexology. Although the first sexologists may well feel to us like relics from the distant past, their conceptual and narrative structures in many ways endure to this day. In these founding texts of sexology, one sees an exhaustive effort being made to derive natural truths from cultural phenomena. Rather than advance the idea that Western society developed customs and practices that emerged from specific historical conditions, these writers often believed that their culture provided a wholly intelligible map for interpreting human nature. To this end, they employed devices that were thought to provide transparent access to the indisputably natural state of sexuality. Above all, they scrutinized bodily behaviours to derive the essential core of desire that erupted from within each human subject.

Particularly important in sexological research is the genre known as the case history. Here the subject of research plots the biographical facts of her or (more usually) his psycho-sexual development. This notable discursive form frequently resembles a

confession in which women and men testify to the often shameful inner truth of their sexual being. It is uncommon indeed to find sexologists pondering how the case history is itself a structure of representation that shapes and manipulates information according to generic and narrative conventions. Sexologists rarely hesitate to question whether the subject under investigation might be swayed towards certain conclusions. After all, the conventions used by sexologists to some degree determine what can and cannot be said within the linear and developmental form that characterizes the history containing each case.

The case history, however, is not the only heuristic device that sexologists employ to extract supposedly natural facts from cultural phenomena. Early sexological writings also substantiate their claims by drawing widely – one might say, promiscuously – on a dazzling assortment of data taken from comparative anthropology, an academic discipline that established itself in the 1860s. Here, too, one can see a marked tendency in such writings to align the cultural manifestation of sexual behaviours with what are presumed to be natural conditions. In one study after another, sexologists strive to show the primitive nature of sexual instinct: a word that explains sexuality in terms of social Darwinism. Developed by the English writer Herbert Spencer (1820–1903), social Darwinism emphasized the ‘survival of the fittest’, a doctrine that proved hugely influential from the 1870s through to the 1930s. Even when not pursuing arguments about the primitive core of civilized society, sexologists often draw amply on biological data to make observations about copulation, mating and reproductive aims. In this respect, it is perhaps no accident that Kinsey – one of the most distinguished sexologists to emerge in the twentieth century – began his academic career as a zoologist; his early research was into the gall wasp.

So with these issues in mind, let me begin by examining several noteworthy aspects of four different works that fall within the general field of sexual science. Starting with the courageous research of the German sexual liberationist, Karl Heinrich Ulrichs (1825–95), I move on to contrast the assumptions upon which the psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing built *Psychopathia Sexualis* (first published in 1886, and revised and expanded in

many successive editions). Two further German works open up the complexity of sexological thinking within this period: first, Iwan Bloch's *The Sexual Life of Our Time* (1908), and second, *Sex and Character* (1975 [1903]) by Otto Weininger (1880–1903). Since much of this writing displays considerable confusion about female sexuality, my discussion proceeds to two notable women writers: Olive Schreiner (1855–1920), who drew on aspects of contemporary scientific thought in the name of a progressive politics of social change; and Radclyffe Hall (1883–1943), whose banned novel *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) drew partly on sexological thought to represent the dignity and integrity of lesbianism. Schreiner's vision, if sharing with the sexologists a number of similar assumptions about sex and race, provides an alternative perspective on women's desires in an era when sexuality was for the first time the subject of extensive research and speculation. Likewise, Hall's controversial fiction reveals how and why a woman's desires might not conform to dominant heterosexual conventions. Given the emergence of fiction, plays and poetry by feminist New Women (such as Sarah Grand [1854–1953]) and Aesthetes and Decadents (such as the aunt and niece who collaborated as Michael Field [1846–1914 and 1862–1913], and Oscar Wilde) with a strong interest in same-sex desire, the period in which sexology emerged has been aptly characterized by Elaine Showalter as one of 'sexual anarchy' (see Showalter 1990): a term she adapts from the novel, *The Odd Woman* (1893) by English writer George Gissing (1857–1903).

Among the sexologists, perhaps the most detailed typology of sexual variation was devised by Ulrichs in the 1860s and 1870s. If the intricate terms he created strike us today as rather bizarre, then his work remains undoubtedly significant precisely because of its determination to refine a vocabulary that sought to specify sexual diversity of many kinds. Ulrichs, a Hanoverian legal official, pursued a lifelong campaign in Germany to justify the naturalness of sexual relations between men. He spelled out his views in a series of twelve short books published between 1864 and 1879, most of which were aimed at transforming state legislation. Pioneering in their field, Ulrichs's writings would become a major point of reference for many later researchers, notably Krafft-Ebing. Ulrichs was the first of a line of zealous researchers whose

radicalism would be gradually eclipsed by thinkers who wished to pathologize the types of 'man-manly love', which he did his utmost to defend as healthy and normal. Ulrichs's work circulated widely, especially among homosexual men seeking information that both explained and legitimized their sexual condition. In one pamphlet after another, Ulrichs brought to light significant details about male homosexuality, details revealed to him in countless letters sent by eager correspondents from all over Europe. In the English tradition, his influence can be felt most palpably in the confessional memoirs of the Victorian critic and poet, Symonds. (For reasons of propriety, Symonds's memoirs had a fifty-year ban placed on their publication when his manuscript passed into the hands of the London Library in 1926. On Symonds, see Bristow 1995: 127–46, and Bristow: 1998.)

Homosexuality, however, is not the word that Ulrichs employs in his analysis of sexual desire between men, since his researches predated that term by several years. Deriving his nomenclature from Plato's *Symposium*, Ulrichs draws a clear distinction between what he calls Uranian and Dionian love. In Ulrichs's model, Uranian desire is expressed by Urnings: these are persons who love their own sex, in the manner of the god Uranus. By comparison, those who experience opposite-sex attraction are named Dionings, after the goddess Dione. 'Urnings', declares Ulrichs, 'have existed in all areas, in antiquity, among uncivilized nomads, indeed, actually among animals' (Ulrichs 1994: 34). Found among primitive peoples, in all periods of history, and in nature itself, Uranian love is said to be more prevalent in Germany than commonly perceived, and it may well be increasing. 'No father', remarks Ulrichs, 'is sure if the germ of this orientation is latent in one of his sons and if it will break through at puberty' (Ulrichs 1994: 35). In each of his short studies, Ulrichs seeks to clarify the precise nature of the Uranian disposition, showing how the 'germ' of same-sex desire is implanted *ab ovo* in the very physiology of the man-loving man.

Ulrichs begins his vindication of man-manly love by insisting on the congenital nature of the Urning's desires. 'There is', he writes, 'a class of born Urnings, a class of individuals who are

born with the sexual drive of women and who have male bodies'. On this basis, he claims that the Urning 'is not a man, but rather a kind of feminine being when it concerns not only his entire organism, but also his sexual feelings of love, his entire natural temperament, and his talents' (Ulrichs 1994: 36). Since the sexed body and the gendered mind of this erotic type are by definition turned inside out, Ulrichs declares that Urnings constitute a '*third sex*': 'not fully men or women'. In making this claim, Ulrichs lays the ground on which he establishes his belief that Urnings are beings who contain the soul of the opposite sex in their own bodies. Contrary to its aims, this idea would have a lasting and damaging influence on twentieth-century prejudices against homosexuals. For it set the trend for imagining that lesbians and gay men were 'inverts'. One of the myths that has circulated most widely about lesbians and gay men is that both sexual identities involve the inversion of assumed gender norms – so that the butch lesbian and the effeminate gay man have often been the recognizable stereotypes that serve to caricature and thus condemn styles of homosexual dissidence.

Committed to the belief that Urnings were a separate sexual species whose desires inverted Dionian ones, Ulrichs focuses on effeminacy as the cardinal sign of the Uranian temperament. 'When Urnings get together', he notes, 'they mostly give themselves feminine nicknames. I suppose this is because they feel like women, even if only subconsciously' (Ulrichs 1994: 60). The more Ulrichs developed this model, the more easily he could argue that there might be a corresponding 'fourth sex': 'a sex of persons built like females having woman–womanly sexual desire, i.e. having the sexual direction of men' (Ulrichs 1994: 81). But as his speculations gathered pace, it became difficult for Ulrichs to account for varieties of sexual behaviour purely in terms of male and female Urnings and Dionings. For one thing, he found himself obliged to consider what would become known later as bisexuality. And true to form, he devised a word for bisexuals: Uranodionings.

By the time he wrote his seventh treatise on man–manly love, Ulrichs had constructed an elaborate system that would include many – but by no means all – possible permutations of Uranian

and Dionian desire, and it is instructive to see how he pieced together the following tabulation of variant sexual types:

- I Men
- II Women
- III Urnings
 - 1 Mannlings
 - 2 Intermediaries
 - 3 Weiblings
- IV Urnings
- V Uranodionings
 - 1 Conjunctive
 - 2 Disjunctive
- VI Uranodioningsins
- VII Hermaphrodites

(Ulrichs 1994: 314)

If this list of seven specimens, together with their qualifying subcategories, looks eccentric, then readers would be well advised to open the pages of any late-twentieth-century encyclopaedia of human sexuality, just to get a sense of the exceptional lengths to which social and medical scientists will go in their effort to identify and comprehend the seemingly endless list of sexual types and behaviours. Ulrichs's meticulous expansion of his list of sexual types indicates the hazards involved in trying to find a language that can adequately describe the phenomena under analysis. Although the clear-cut opposition between Uranian and Dionian desires has already been described, the polarity they represent becomes altogether less stable when we look carefully at the additional terms he uses here to designate different forms of desire.

Among Urnings, for example, there are two internally opposed types: Mannlings (virile homosexuals) and Weiblings (effeminate homosexuals). Between these two stand the Intermediaries who belong to a revealingly liminal category that, in Ulrichs's scheme, allows his readers to understand how a virile Urning might take a passive role in sex, while an effeminate Urning might adopt an active position. Further down the list come the Urnings, later

named in the early twentieth century as lesbians, but it is clear from the whole of Ulrichs's writings that he knew next to nothing about lesbianism, or what he sometimes called 'woman-womanly' desire. Thereafter, we find the bisexuals, who also fall into two categories: conjunctive (who experience 'sensual love in a double direction'), and disjunctive (who 'feel only a romantic gentle love for young men'). Regarding the latter, Ulrichs declares: 'Shakespeare perhaps belongs in this category' (Ulrichs 1994: 313–14). No doubt the nineteenth-century critical controversies surrounding Shakespeare's sonnets were on Ulrichs's mind when pondering sexual love between older and younger men. The final two categories identify female bisexuals and intersexual persons who bear the physical characteristics of both sexes.

In Ulrichs's idiosyncratic system for naming all of these sexual variants, one point becomes patently clear. It is impossible for Ulrichs to construct his model of erotic identities without taking for granted that all sexualities are grounded on a principle of sexual difference. Ulrichs always assumes that the desire of any one person is predicated on an attraction to an opposite pole. In his first analysis, he renders Uranian or man-manly love intelligible because it reveals how a feminine soul seeks a masculine object. Likewise, when pressed to account for active and passive homosexual behaviours, Ulrichs interprets the positions taken up by each partner as either feminine or masculine. Everywhere we look in his scheme of sexual relations, the same principle obtains. Feminine desires require their masculine complement, and vice versa, whether in Uranian or Dionian forms. In Ulrichs's view, sex was always split into two antithetical but none the less complementary types. His belief that the Urning embodies an inverted sexual identity is generally thought to mark a decisively new stage in Western conceptions of sex. We might perhaps label this the psychiatric model of sexuality, since there is an assumed discordance between the sexual mind and the sexual body in Ulrichs's theory of Uranian desire. Previous writers on sexual physiology seldom questioned the congruence between the sexed body and the sexed being of a man or a woman. The sexological discourse on homosexuality did much to shatter such an assumption.

What cultural conditions made this particular style of thinking possible in the 1860s? One answer would be that, in the nineteenth century, the idea that the sexes were polar opposites magnetically attracted to each other had such a tight ideological grip on the culture that intellectuals believed it was an indisputable fact of nature. Ulrichs was hardly alone among sexual radicals in basing his thinking about eroticism on highly conventional notions about femininity and masculinity. It is useful to compare his writings with those of the English socialist essayist, poet and socialist politician Edward Carpenter (1844–1929), who championed Ulrichs's belief in the 'third sex'. Like Ulrichs, Carpenter readily acknowledged that the polar opposition between men and women was the fault of existing social relations: 'As a rule they [boy and girl] know little of each other; society has kept the two sexes apart ... They hardly understand each other.' But such comments would not prevent him, in a radical pamphlet titled 'Woman, and Her Place in a Free Society' (1894), from asserting: 'Man has developed the more active, and Woman the more passive virtues.' Carpenter drew on recent scientific inquiries to back up the following view: 'In woman ... the more fundamental and primitive nervous centre, and the great vaso-motor system of nerves generally, are developed to a greater extent than in men.' On this basis, he made the following argument: 'Woman is the more primitive, the more intuitive, the more emotional; the great unconscious and cosmic processes of Nature lie somehow nearer to her' (Carpenter 1894a: 6; 1894b, 22; 1894c, 8–9). Although Carpenter followed Ulrichs in championing the dignity of what he called 'the intermediate sex' and 'homogenic love', his work contains classic examples that demonstrate how his well-intentioned liberatory sexual politics construes distinctions between the sexes in strikingly orthodox terms. It took many decades before a consensus was reached that emotionality, passivity and primitiveness were hardly qualities that could be naturally attributed to women.

The problems involved in Ulrichs's schematic conception of inversion were compounded by the far from radical inquiry into sexuality produced by Krafft-Ebing. A professor of psychiatry at the University of Vienna, Krafft-Ebing was one of Sigmund

Freud's most distinguished colleagues. The title of his major work, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, makes it clear that this examination of desire adopts a medical perspective on the psychological and pathological condition of erotic life. As Bloch writes, 'Krafft-Ebing is, and remains, the true founder of modern sexual pathology' (Bloch 1908: 455). The scope of Krafft-Ebing's often intriguing investigation is much broader than Ulrichs's series of short studies. Divided into five sections, the book not only pays attention to the psychology and physiology of sexual love, it also devotes a great amount of space to the itemization of 'pathological manifestations': from 'sexual neuroses' to 'satyriasis and nymphomania' (that is, male and female forms of heterosexual erotomania). The concluding part of the study considers the legal regulation of sexual acts, especially ones of a perverse nature. 'Criminal statistics', writes Krafft-Ebing, 'prove the sad fact that sexual crimes are progressively increasing in our modern civilization' (Krafft-Ebing 1894: 378). This is his clarion call to the power of the state to control as much as possible any 'abnormalities' that are likely to result in 'immorality'. 'From what experience teaches', he insists, 'it may be said that, among the sexual acts that occur, rape, mutilation, pederasty, *amor lesbicus*, and bestiality may have a psycho-pathological basis' (Krafft-Ebing 1894: 382). To modern readers, it surely takes a considerable leap of the imagination to understand how lesbianism might have a similar pathological status to bestiality and rape.

Rather than summarize each and every aspect of Krafft-Ebing's fascination with the diseased features of human sexuality, I want to draw attention to the main assumptions underpinning his belief that eroticism was always proximate to mental and physical disorders. Throughout *Psychopathia Sexualis*, he unwaveringly maintains that sexual desire is a potentially explosive power that it has been the purpose of civilization to tame. 'Sexuality', he declares on the very first page, 'is the most powerful factor in individual and social existence'. He adds: 'Love as an unbridled passion is like a fire that burns and consumes everything; like an abyss that swallows all, — honour, fortune, well-being' (Krafft-Ebing 1894: 1–2). These remarks place such emphasis on the fundamental power of sexual feeling in the male of the

species that he never stops to think if this idea is unique to the period in which he is writing. Instead, Krafft-Ebing sets out to show how the highest forms of cultural organization in the West have gone to considerable lengths to assuage, if not completely master, apparently dangerous sexual energies. To support his argument, he is obliged to draw comparisons between pre-eminent Northern European societies and those that have apparently failed to attain such dignified levels of breeding and gentility.

'On primitive ground the satisfaction of the sexual appetite of man seems like that of an animal', Krafft-Ebing asserts. Only with the advent of morality were human beings able to dissociate themselves from this degrading condition. First, the genitals were covered because of a morally uplifting sense of shame. Second, women were treated with increasing respect, no longer abused as 'thing[s] to satisfy lust and to work'. Finally, the civilizing process was complete when monogamy had full rein, a point that comes into focus when Krafft-Ebing attempts to contrast Christian and Muslim attitudes to marriage:

The fact that in higher civilization human love must be monogamous and rest on a lasting contract was thus recognized. If nature does not more than provide for procreation, a commonwealth (family or state) cannot exist without a guarantee that the offspring shall flourish physically, morally, and intellectually. Christendom gained both mental and material superiority over the polygamous races, especially Islam, through the equalization of woman and man, and by establishing monogamous marriage and securing it by legal, religious, and moral ties.

If Mohammed was actuated by a desire to raise woman from her place as a slave and means of sensual gratification to a higher social and matrimonial plane, nevertheless, in the Mohammedan world woman remained far below man, to whom alone divorce was allowed and also made very easy.

(Krafft-Ebing 1894: 5)

On this view, Christianity makes for a preferably higher set of sexual arrangements than Islam because monogamy controls the

animal-like passion that constantly threatens to degrade the man. In making this claim, Krafft-Ebing upholds the commonplace Victorian wisdom that men are innately aggressive in their sexual drives, while women embody modesty and passivity. 'Probably', speculates Krafft-Ebing, 'feminine modesty is an hereditarily evolved product of the development of civilization' (Krafft-Ebing 1894: 15). He argues that, unlike the restive sexuality of the male, the woman has her 'native element' in 'love' – a desire for protection by a husband, which is met in return by the care and attention she devotes to the man's every need. So it may appear rather strange that he should stake such a strong claim on the 'superiority' of Christianity in securing the 'equalization of woman and man'.

But Krafft-Ebing reveals that even such 'equalization' between the sexes holds no uncertain dangers. Given his propensity for linking desire with disease, Krafft-Ebing amplifies his understanding of how civilized men and women create honourable, loving marriages by appealing to a concept that verges on the brink of being pathological. The concept in question is the fetish, a phenomenon that Freud would later theorize in a well-known paper published in 1927. In *Psychopathia Sexualis*, sexual love reaches its highest point through the highly individualized, distinctive, and thus fetishistic pleasures that a man derives from the object of his affections. In other words, sexual love in marriage is based on the unique fetishism enjoyed by the man. This theory helps to explain precisely how men select their partners in a discriminating rather than lustful way:

It is well-known from experience that accident determines this mental association, that the objects of the fetish may be individually very diverse, and that thus the most peculiar sympathies (and antipathies) arise.

These physiological facts of fetishism explain the individual sympathies between husband and wife; the preference of a certain person to all others of the same sex. Since the fetish represents a symbol that is purely individual, it is clear that its effect must be individual. Since it is coloured by the most intense pleasurable feeling, it follows that possible faults in the beloved object are overlooked ('Love is

blind'), and an exaltation of it is induced that to others is incomprehensible, and even silly under some circumstances.

(Krafft-Ebing 1894: 19)

It does not take much to see how this theoretical model has been devised to manage the basic fear that runs throughout Krafft-Ebing's work: that all sexual love, even in its most distinguished and praiseworthy form in marriage, is to some degree tainted with illness. That is why he is at pains to argue that the 'fetish may constantly retain its significance' for the man 'without being pathological'. But this shall only be the case if 'the particular concept' – such as the love of perfume, the shape of a foot, or the colour and texture of hair – 'is developed into a general concept'. If male heterosexual desire in all its refined particularity was ultimately unable to distance itself from its pathological love of the fetish, then such eroticism would remain reprehensibly perverse.

Given the overwhelming quantities of evidence that Krafft-Ebing subsequently produces on the topic of sexual perversion, *Psychopathia Sexualis* makes the distinct impression that the highest form of heterosexual love is menaced on all sides by an epidemic of perverse sexual behaviours. The numerous case histories included in his chapters on sadism, masochism, fetishism and homosexuality attest to what he considers are widespread sexual disorders among men. Take, for example, one of the longer cases studied in the chapter on masochism, the perversion that Krafft-Ebing himself named after Leopold Sacher-Masoch (1836–95), remembered for his fiction of perverse desire, *Venus in Furs* (1870). 'Case 50' features a man of thirty-five who declares that from an early age he has been perpetually excited by fantasies involving whipping. Here is how he tells part of his story:

Even in my early childhood I loved to revel in ideas about the absolute mastery of one man over others. The thought of slavery had something in it for me, and alike whether from the standpoint of master and servant. That one man could possess, sell, or whip another, caused me intense excitement; and in reading *Uncle Tom's Cabin* [the 1852 novel about American slavery, by Harriet Beecher Stowe

(1811–96)] ... I had erections. ... Though these ideas caused erections, yet I have never masturbated in my life; and from my nineteenth year I had coitus without the help of these ideas and without any relation to them. I always had a great preference for elderly, voluptuous, large women, though I did not scorn younger ones.

(Krafft-Ebing 1894: 105)

As his narrative unravels, 'Case 50' reveals how he has only been able to enact his fantasies by hiring the services of prostitutes. Such experiences have quelled his desires for no more than periods of two weeks, after which he usually suffers his 'next attack' that consequently forces his return to the brothel for another series of punishments from his 'mistress'. Even though he enjoyed a satisfactory sexual relationship in the early months of his marriage, his masochistic desires proved the stronger. Yet rather than admit his masochism is a problem, 'Case 50' almost seems to take pride in his condition: 'in spite of its marked pathological character, masochism is not only incapable of destroying pleasure in my life, but it does not in the least affect my outward life' (Krafft-Ebing 1894: 108). In fact, the more one looks at this case history, the more obvious it seems that the masochistic rituals in which this man engages form a dynamic and vibrant part of his existence – although there is immense cultural pressure on him to believe otherwise.

Faced with such materials that enlarged his contemporaries' knowledge of the irrepressible force of sexual perversion, one might reasonably expect Krafft-Ebing to provide a detailed analysis of the cultural, psychic or physiological sources of such diseased eroticism. So what exactly does Krafft-Ebing have to say about the causes of perverse desire? The answer is surprisingly little. His chapters on sadistic and masochistic practices form a stream of almost uninterrupted case histories, testimonials and other documentation drawn from researchers who had already amassed plenty of data on the topic. One has to wade through endless pages of this material before one reaches an explanation. And when the moment comes to pass judgement on precisely what causes such perverse behaviours, Krafft-Ebing follows the majority of his intellectual peers by taking recourse to

heredity: 'masochism, as a congenital sexual perversion, constitutes a functional sign of degeneration in (almost exclusively) hereditary taint; and this clinical deduction is confirmed in my cases of masochism and sadism' (Krafft-Ebing 1894: 147).

Significantly, Krafft-Ebing supplies a rather different diagnosis when confronting homosexuality. To be sure, he generally asserts that same-sex desire is, like all other perversities, a congenital condition. On occasion, however, his evidence points to moments when same-sex desire has been expediently 'acquired', rather than inborn. He believes that aberrant episodes of homosexual intercourse occur when cultural factors prevail against the seemingly normal path of desire towards the opposite sex:

Sometimes the development of higher sexual feelings toward the opposite sex suffers, on account of hypochondriacal fear of infection in sexual intercourse; or on account of an actual infection; or they suffer as a result of faulty education which points out such dangers and exaggerates them. Again (especially in females), fear of the result of coitus (pregnancy), or abhorrence of men, by reason of mental or moral weakness, may direct into perverse channels an instinct that makes itself felt with abnormal intensity. But too early and perverse sexual satisfaction injures not merely the mind, but also the body; inasmuch as it induces neuroses of the sexual apparatus (irritable weakness of the centres governing erection and ejaculation; defective pleasurable feeling in coitus), while, at the same time, it maintains the imagination and libido in continuous excitement.

(Krafft-Ebing 1894: 189)

This extract is highly representative of how Krafft-Ebing anxiously handles the precarious divide between pathological homosexual desire and healthy heterosexual love. Once he concedes that congenital conditions cannot account for each and every sexual perversion, he finds himself remarking that there may indeed be environmental circumstances which discourage women from creating sexual partnerships with men. Throughout this paragraph, one sees how difficult it is for him to align conventional prejudices against the moral weakness of women with the natural state of female heterosexuality. Somehow, a woman is

liable to fall short of the desires that are naturally her own. In this respect, Krafft-Ebing is voicing troubled and contradictory thoughts about female sexuality that are very much of his epoch. In spite of itself, his commentary discloses that lesbian desire was perhaps a much greater possibility in late-nineteenth-century culture than a highly moralistic society was willing to admit, not least because there were plausible social reasons why women may well prefer intimate relations with their own sex rather than with men.

Yet even if *Psychopathia Sexualis* did everything it could to uphold normal, healthy, heterosexual desire in marriage, it should be borne in mind that Krafft-Ebing's work was none the less widely censured. By the time the tenth edition of this influential tome appeared in 1902, the *British Medical Journal* said it was 'the most repulsive of a group of books of which it is type'. Lesley Hall and Roy Porter note that, in the course of the decade in which it made its appearance in Britain, Krafft-Ebing's study was finally viewed 'as little more than a scientific work of pornography' (Porter and Hall 1995: 163). Strict social codes of respectability, ones that deemed sex to be a wholly unspeakable topic, often militated against the broad circulation of sexological writings. A similar fate would befall related works in the field. By the time the English translation of Iwan Bloch's *Sexual Life of Our Time* was published in 1908, all copies were deemed fit for burning by the Magistrates' Court in London's Bow Street.

But if such works were condemned by the law courts for the same heinous crime of discussing eroticism, it should not be forgotten that there were many differences of opinion between the sexologists themselves. Although Bloch pays a gracious tribute to the pioneering research of Krafft-Ebing, he remains dissatisfied with the exclusively medical focus of *Psychopathia Sexualis*. Especially misguided, he feels, is Krafft-Ebing's insistence on labelling many sexual behaviours degenerate. To show why perverse sexual behaviours are not necessarily diseases, Bloch turns to the flourishing field of anthropological inquiry, since it is there he finds indisputable truths about the biological basis of human eroticism. '[L]et us', declares Bloch, 'compare the sexuality of the civilized human being with that of the savage; then we shall recognize the

vast extension of our visual field for the comprehension of psychopathia sexualis' (Bloch 1908: 456). *The Sexual Life of Our Times* devotes much of its attention to the interaction between the evolution of the species and the civilizing conditions that have served to regulate and ennoble sexual instinct. In trying to reveal how eroticism has been shaped by the cultural environment, Bloch sees sexuality formed from two contrary but innate impulses. Drawing on a rich array of contemporary scientific writings, he argues that both lust and shame are inborn qualities. He claims the practice of wearing clothing stems from an inherent sense of shame that provokes desire. In other words, the cultural practice of covering the genitals derives from two natural sources: an inbuilt erotic drive and a biologically determined sense of modesty. In so-called primitive cultures, he maintains, tattooing and body adornment could be viewed as having the same dual function (see Bloch 1908: 149–57).

In revealing how sexuality was born of spontaneous lust and self-regulating shame, Bloch rallies a huge amount of evidence to maintain his belief that the uneasy feelings associated with eroticism have completely harmless sources. Above all, it is on the topic of masturbation that Bloch breaks with the burden of prejudice that caused some Victorian doctors to perform cliterodectomies to arrest the hazardous excitements presumed to arise from female autoeroticism. Such excitements were thought to lead to insanity, a view Bloch cautiously, and somewhat apologetically, sets out to refute:

Auto-erotism (including its grosser form, masturbation) is ... to a certain extent, a physiological manifestation; it becomes morbid only in certain conditions – that is to say, individuals who are previously morbid. This is, indeed, an old medical doctrine, that there exists a physiological masturbation *faute de mieux*, and a morbid masturbation in cases of neurasthenia, mental disorder, and other troubles. ... The ultimate cause of such auto-erotic manifestations as belong neither to the category of 'vice' nor to that of 'crime' is to be found ... in a disharmony in the nature of many in respect of the premature development of sexual sensibility. For this reason we meet with these manifestations among the lowest races of mankind as we do among

civilized peoples; even among animals autoerotism is a widely diffused phenomenon. This can be observed, not only among the monkeys (perhaps already a little civilized) of our Zoological Gardens, which masturbate freely *coram publico*, but it may be seen also in horses.

(Bloch 1908: 411)

'Even elephants masturbate', Bloch goes on to assure us, thus emphasizing the wholly natural basis to what most of his contemporaries considered a 'gross' practice.

Here and elsewhere Bloch assuredly runs against the grain of Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis*. But no matter how much Bloch strives to undermine the established sexological tendency to pathologize desire, passages such as this one cry out for an analysis that would reach beyond the extremely limiting explanations achieved by appealing to the natural world. So it is significant that, within a matter of pages, Bloch briefly alludes to Sigmund Freud's innovative *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, which appeared in Vienna in 1905. In the light of Freud's work, Bloch observes that autoeroticism belongs to a pattern of psycho-sexual development: 'auto-erotism is almost always a precursor of completely developed sexuality, and manifests itself a long time before puberty'. 'Freud', adds Bloch, 'enumerates among the regions of the body by the stimulation of which sexual pleasure is most readily obtained, the lips of the infant, which, in sucking the mother's breast or its substitute, receive an instinctive perception of pleasure, in which the stimulation produced by the warm flow of milk also plays a part' (Bloch 1908: 413). Such comments indicate precisely the grounds on which psychoanalysis would begin to supersede sexology when theorizing the origins of autoerotic pleasure, as theories based in biology proved unable to account for how far culture could and did depart from nature.

But if Bloch reveals an emergent awareness of how biological science could not wholly account for certain sexual activities, then elsewhere he absorbs many of the more reactionary styles of thought that set a definite limit on *Psychopathia Sexualis* and even Ulrichs's defences of inversion. Following its predecessors in the

sexological tradition, Bloch's book devotes much space to discussing acquired and congenital forms of homosexuality. Like his contemporary, the sex radical Magnus Hirschfeld (1868–1935), Bloch sees in the congenital man-loving man specific physical manifestations of inversion. The homosexual body becomes the focus of a supposedly scrupulous medical gaze:

More especially after removing any beard or moustache that be present, we sometimes see much more clearly the feminine expression of face in a male homosexual, whilst before the hair was removed they appeared quite man-like. Still more important for the determination of a feminine habitus are direct physical characteristics. Among these there must be mentioned a *considerable deposit of fat*, by which the resemblance to the feminine type is produced, the contours of the body being more rounded than in the case of the normal male. In correspondence with this the *muscular system* is less powerfully developed than it is in heterosexual men, the skin is delicate and soft, and the complexion is much clearer than is usual in men.

(Bloch 1908: 498–99)

Ridiculous to modern eyes, this professedly medical appraisal of the feminine distribution of fat in male Urnings betrays its voyeuristic fascination when Bloch recollects seeing a group of male homosexuals *en masse*: 'Last winter I attended an urnings' ball, and I was much impressed, when looking at the *décolleté* men, with the remarkable whiteness of their skin on the shoulders, neck, and back – also in those who had not applied powder – and by the fact that the little acne spots almost always present in normal men were absent in these.' Pale and delicate, these Urnings also bore another feature that made them into a separate species: 'The peculiar rounding of the shoulders', writes Bloch, 'was also remarkable, from its resemblance to what one sees in women' (Bloch 1908: 499).

In making these observations, there is no doubt that Bloch wishes to contest Krafft-Ebing's earlier beliefs in the degenerate nature of homosexuality. 'For me', insists Bloch, 'there is no longer any doubt that homosexuality is compatible with complete mental and physical health' (Bloch 1908: 490). His depiction of

the male cross-dressers' ball points to an area of confusion that persists in sexological thought to this day. It is only too clear that his stance as a scientific observer becomes entranced by the delightful forms of sexual display that have lured him into their circle. Surveying a group of men enjoying transgender roles, Bloch is seduced by the spectacular exoticism of this event. His writing discloses little about the sexual condition of the men donning *décolleté* dresses. Instead, he reveals his own wild fantasies about the male homosexual body: a body on to which a great many fears and fascinations have been projected for the past hundred years, and which intensified alarmingly during the first decade of the AIDS epidemic. Even if propounding the belief that homosexuality is a sign of 'complete mental and physical health', *The Sexual Life of Our Time* expresses a prurient interest in establishing the indisputable psychical and bodily difference of male homosexuals from their heterosexual opposites. Bloch is obviously straining hard for minute evidence of distinctive signs whose sexual otherness shall support his claims.

Scientists, however, were not the only researchers who regularly made what now appear outlandish assertions about the sexual phenomena they sought to analyse. The philosopher Otto Weininger's *Sex and Character* (1903), a book notorious for its misogyny and anti-Semitism, produced a revealingly different theoretical model to account for sexual difference. From cover to cover, this largely philosophical work pushes what was a limited vocabulary for comprehending sexual desire to an excruciating limit. An immensely popular study running into many editions, *Sex and Character* was written by a young, self-hating Jewish homosexual who, shortly after his conversion to Protestantism, shot himself at the age of twenty-three. Based on the doctoral dissertation he submitted to the University of Vienna, Weininger's disreputable volume emerged in the intellectual climate that fostered Krafft-Ebing's and Freud's diverging strands of thought about sexuality. In some idiosyncratic respects, *Sex and Character* is possibly more radical than its deservedly bad reputation might lead us to believe. Despite its numerous offensive passages, the twisted logic of Weininger's inquiry intriguingly challenges the stark contrast earlier sexologists such as Krafft-Ebing

and Bloch made between men and women, heterosexuality and homosexuality.

Although not strictly a work of sexological research, *Sex and Character* draws liberally on contemporary debates stemming from hereditarian science to support its central belief that sex is always a matter of a degree, rather than a fixed opposition. Here is how Weininger puts his case about the relative position of men and women with regard to sex: 'The fact is that males and females are like two substances combined in different proportions, but with either element never wholly missing. We find, so to speak, never either a man or a woman, but only the male condition and the female condition' (Weininger 1975: 8). In advancing this view, Weininger is expanding in modern form the conviction held by anatomists since the time of the classical philosopher, Galen of Pergamum (c. 130–200AD), that masculinity and femininity derived from one sex, not two. (Galen's view, by the way, did not assume that the one sex from which men and women derived ensured equality between the sexes. See Laqueur 1990: 25–28.) 'Sexual differentiation', writes Weininger, 'is never complete. All the peculiarities of the male sex may be present in the female in some form, however weakly developed; and so also the sexual characteristics of the woman persist in the man, although perhaps they are not so completely rudimentary. The characters of the other sex occur in the one sex in a vestigial form' (Weininger 1975: 5). Hence, on this model, a man's nipples are made of tissue that develops into breasts in the female of the species. Likewise, the light growth of facial hair to be found even in highly feminine women is the vestige of the full beard common to the male sex.

Consequently, Weininger asserts that all human beings abide in 'a permanent bisexual condition', a bisexuality that he insists should not be confused with hermaphroditism. If, argues Weininger, we accept the fundamental 'bisexual' state of humanity, then we can appreciate 'all sorts of intermediate conditions between male and female – sexual transitional forms'. Even though we may like to believe that 'ideal types of man' and an 'ideal woman' exist, such types are merely imaginary. But here Weininger's theory takes one of its most infamous turns. Rather than maintain that the 'intermediate' or 'bisexual' nature of all

sexual variations is to be celebrated in its diversity, he proposes that 'ideal' types of men and women 'not only can be constructed, but must be constructed'. 'As in art', he writes, 'so in science, the real purpose is to reach the type, the Platonic Idea' (Weininger 1975: 7). Such a view marks the beginnings of a particularly worrying version of social engineering: for society, he believes, must be guided towards producing an 'ideal' sexual antithesis out of a potentially chaotic 'bisexual' order.

Weininger was read and discussed by many modernist writers, such as D.H. Lawrence (1885–1930) and Gertrude Stein (1874–1946), both of whom had a strong interest in same-sex desire. Part of the appeal of *Sex and Character* was its decisive emphasis on how human beings are not as sexually differentiated as many of his contemporaries would like to think. He views homosexuality as a wholly comprehensible part of the broad span of sexual identities stretching out between absolute forms of masculinity and femininity. But that does not mean he approves of homosexual eroticism:

Homo-sexuality is merely the sexual condition of these intermediate sexual forms that stretch from one ideally sexual condition to the other sexual condition. In my view all actual organisms have both homo-sexuality and hetero-sexuality.

That the rudiment of homo-sexuality, in however weak a form, exists in every human being, corresponding to the greater or smaller development of the characters of the opposite sex, is proved conclusively from the fact that in the adolescent stage, while there is still a considerable amount of undifferentiated sexuality, and before the internal secretions have exerted their stimulating force, passionate attachments with a sensual side rule amongst boys as well as amongst girls.

A person who retains from that age onwards a marked tendency to 'friendship' with a person of his own sex must have a strong taint of the other sex in him.

(Weininger 1975: 49)

Lest it appear that Weininger is referring solely to homosexual desire when he mentions 'friendship' between men, he goes on to

claim that there 'is no friendship between men that has not an element of sexuality in it' (Weininger 1975: 49). In other words, closeness between men of any kind carries an element of attraction, thereby making it difficult indeed to distinguish between sex and friendship. From his perspective, each and every same-sex relation is always already eroticized. There seems to be no escape from the all-consuming perversions of sex.

To ensure that the pervasive threat of homoeroticism does not gain full expression in human society, Weininger insists that the sexual distinctions between men and women must be pushed further and further apart. Male and female, he argues, have to be constructed as the ideal antithetical absolutes that shall overcome the disorder created by the 'bisexual' state against which human beings must constantly battle. To this end, Weininger wants to uphold a rigid divide between the male's powers of mind and the female's powers of sensuality:

The incongruity between the man and woman depends, in a special measure, on the fact that the contents of the thoughts of the man are not merely those of the woman in a higher state of differentiation, but that the two have totally distinct sequences of thought applied to the same object, conceptual thought in the one and indistinct sensing in the other.

(Weininger 1975: 191)

To Weininger, there are certain phenomena that show precisely how and why the male intellect can and must achieve a successful separation from the retarding sensuality of women. He declares the highest form of masculinity is genius, a condition to which women simply cannot aspire. Genius, he claims, marks the triumph of the male to remove itself furthest from what he calls the 'henid' or sexually intermediate stage of humanity. 'In this way', he writes, 'genius declares itself to be a kind of higher masculinity, and thus the female cannot be possessed of genius' (Weininger 1975: 111). Instead, the woman 'is always living in a condition of fusion with all the human beings she knows, even when she is alone'. 'Women', adds Weininger, 'have no definite individual limits', for they lack both an ego and the

faculty of reason. Having pursued this point, Weininger concludes 'she is sexuality itself'. This claim, however, leads Weininger into increasingly contorted argumentation, since he finds himself having to distinguish between (1) the admirable sexuality ascribed to respectable women, whose ideal destiny is motherhood, and (2) the degrading sexuality manifest in the prostitute. The conflict between these competing types of sexualized femininity reaches breaking-point in his argument when he suddenly proclaims: 'Probably most women have both possibilities in them, the mother and the prostitute' (Weininger 1975: 217).

This extreme statement is undoubtedly the result of a long-established tradition of sexist thought that became deeply entrenched during the Victorian period. During the nineteenth century, European and American cultures at times insisted on dividing femininity into angelic and demonic, virtuous and vicious types – implying that these apparently opposite poles of good and bad women were in some respect interdependent. So with this inflexible logic in mind, Weininger hurtles towards the drastic conclusion that men are constantly in danger from the devouring passions of all women, since not even respectable females can suppress their inexhaustible eroticism. Not only is a woman thought to be wholly dependent on a man to satisfy her voracious desires, she is also said to weaken the man by manipulating his vulnerable sexual instincts. Consequently, Weininger advises men to aspire to the high moral ideal of chastity so that they are not lured into the devitalizing excesses of coitus. He assumes it is women's maddening enthrallment to sexuality that threatens to make men slaves to it as well:

If he is going to treat her as the moral idea demands, he must try to see in her the concept of mankind and endeavour to respect her. Even although woman is only a function of man, a function he can degrade or raise at will, and women do not wish to be anything else than what man makes them, it is no more a moral arrangement than the suttee of Indian widows, which, even though it be voluntary and insisted upon by them, is none the less terrible barbarity.

(Weininger 1975: 338)

This extract certainly counts among the most conflicted moments in Weininger's study. For just as he seeks to prove that men can and should have mastery over women, he recognizes at once that such a 'moral arrangement' closely resembles the 'terrible barbarity' of the Indian practice of sati – widow-burning – that British colonialists perceived as a horrific expression of primitive brutality. In other words, Weininger has to balance his high moral ideals against what he considers an inhuman punishment. Perhaps, after all, there really is no difference between civilized and savage attitudes towards women. That, at least, is one consequence of an argument that perpetually imperils its leading claims.

Not accidentally, Weininger is led to consider the links between three areas of contemporary culture that marked some of the greatest inequalities within the West. Jews, African slaves and women all come under the same contradictory rubric: to be treated in a moral spirit that ensures their rightful subjection:

Although the humanity of Jews, negroes, and still more of women, is weighed down by many immoral impulses; although in these cases there is so much more to fight against than in the case of Aryan men, still we must try to respect mankind, and to venerate the idea of humanity ...

The problem of woman and the problem of the Jews are absolutely identical with the problem of slavery, and they must be solved in the same way. No one should be oppressed, even if the oppression is of such a kind as to be unfelt as such. The animals about a house are not 'slaves', because they have no freedom in the proper sense of the word which could be taken away.

(Weininger 1975: 338)

No one could doubt that here we can see the foundations laid for a distinctly fascist style of thought. On the one hand, Weininger speaks a high-minded language of 'respect', while, on the other hand, he remarks that all subordinated groups are analogous to household pets. In conclusion, the 'respect' shown towards those peoples subjugated by the males of the Aryan master-race amounts to a condescending appreciation of the inborn

subservience of each inferior group. It should come as no surprise, then, that Nazi propaganda was citing Weininger's work as late as January 1945 (see Hyams 1995: 155–68).

In his imposing study of the Nazi *Freikorps* of the 1920s and 1930s, Karl Theweleit shows precisely how this manner of sexual thinking fed into fascist military ideology. Members of this elite were encouraged to create chaste bonds of brotherliness to protect themselves from the ravenous and vitiating sexuality they felt were characteristic of women:

Women who don't confirm to any of the 'good woman' images are automatically seen [by the *Freikorps*] as prostitutes, as the vehicle of 'urges'. They are evil and out to castrate, and they are treated accordingly. The men are soldiers. Fighting is their life, and they aren't about to wait until that monstrous thing happens to them. They take the offensive before these women can put their horrible plans into practice.

(Theweleit 1987: 171)

Like the countless images of *femmes fatales* hung in many a *fin-de-siècle* art gallery, the 'bad' women who haunted the military minds of the *Freikorps* represented the vengeful force of female sexuality. Just as Weininger's *Sex and Character* declares that men must resist sexual enslavement by women, the elite Nazi soldiers feared being engulfed by destructive female desires.

Depressingly, residual forms of Weininger's system of thought still retain a certain currency in some areas of popular cultural criticism. Although hardly fascist in intention, Camille Paglia's *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* (1990) resonates with ideas about the different sexual and artistic capabilities of men and women that echo *Sex and Character*. On Paglia's model, men attain genius precisely because of their sexual anatomy, a feature that enables them to guard against female forces that are a constant danger to civilization:

What had nature given man to defend himself against women? Here we come to the source of man's cultural achievements, which follow so directly from his singular anatomy. ... Man is sexually

compartmentalized. Genitally, he is condemned to a perpetual pattern of linearity, focus, aim, directedness. He must learn to aim. Without aim, urination and ejaculation end in infantile soiling of self or surroundings.

(Paglia 1990: 12)

In contrast to these penile perpendiculars, women's sexuality is said to be 'diffused throughout her body'. 'Her desire for fore-play', adds Paglia, 'remains a notorious area of miscommunication between the sexes'. While men want sex straight up and down, women require an endless plateau of pleasure – or so Paglia wants us to believe.

According to Paglia, Western culture has been built on an eternal war waged between timeless, inherent and universal masculine and feminine forces that can be found in two sources: (1) the animus and anima that characterize the psychological archetypes influentially explored by C.G. Jung (1875–1961), and (2) the violent dialectic between male Apollonian aspiration towards art and female Dionysian dwelling in primeval nature discussed by German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900). Espoused to these everlasting principles, Paglia asserts: 'Woman is the primeval fabricator, the real First Mover.' Associated with a formless state of natural being, woman – in Paglia's lurid prose – 'turns a gob of refuse into a spreading web of sentient being, floating on the snaky umbilical by which she leashes every man'. Hence, on this view, it remains man's task to release himself from the serpentine noose that coils around him. 'Reason and logic', insists Paglia, 'are the anxiety-inspired domain of Apollo, premiere god of sky-cult'. The 'Dionysian', by contrast, 'is liquid nature, a miasmatic swamp whose prototype is the still pond of the womb' (Paglia 1990: 12). Much as we might be dazzled by her poeticisms, Paglia ironically produces a theory that is as static as the ever-spreading formless femininity that to her mind reveals women's natural propensity not to produce great art. Nowhere does Paglia provide sociological insights that might account for the persistent sexual inequality that remains highly visible in the West. Instead, *Sexual Personae* belongs to an outmoded tradition of thought that consigns masculinity and

femininity to antithetical energies supposed to be deeply embedded in human nature.

FEMINIST CONTENTIONS

For all the influence that they have enjoyed in modern culture, the claims made by sexological writings have hardly gone uncontested, not least by feminist thinkers. Feminists have for decades been involved more than any other group in a vigorous dialogue with this body of research. In this section, therefore, I want to reflect for a moment on a handful of contrasting interventions that feminists have made when engaging with sexology. This part of the discussion shows that feminist theorists have written both within and against the sexological tradition. Like the early male sexologists, some late-Victorian feminists were fascinated by the influential theory of 'sexual selection' laid out in Charles Darwin's *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871). Similarly, they absorbed aspects of social Darwinism (notably in Herbert Spencer's *First Principles* [1862]) and the science of eugenics or 'race-health' (whose founder was Darwin's cousin, Francis Galton [1855–1920]). It has been argued that sexology came to exert considerable influence over feminist thought in Britain by the time women had gained the suffrage in 1918. Sheila Jeffreys believes that the sexism of sexological discourse in large part neutralized further feminist campaigns for liberation (Jeffreys 1985). Even if Jeffreys's opinion has been questioned by other historians (see Bland 1995: 308), it is fair to claim that feminist thinking in the 1920s was often taken up with promoting the heterosexual woman's power in reproducing the race. Consequently, motherhood became the truest sign of women's cultural authority. This perspective meant that single women and lesbians were at times viewed as contemptible inferior beings who had failed to bear the proper fruits of womanhood. Yet in the same period, it is plain to see that lesbians themselves might choose to adapt rather different aspects of sexological research in the name of their own political empowerment. Let us look in turn at these two conflicting ways in which notable women writers intervened in sexological debate.

The South African political campaigner and author Olive Schreiner was one of several prominent radical thinkers who, in a critical spirit, drew on features of evolutionary thinking to support women's liberation. Renowned for her fine experimental novel, *The Story of An African Farm* (1883), and her distinguished sequence of visionary allegories, *Dreams* (1890), Schreiner was a political activist who divided her time between Britain and South Africa, and on several occasions her life was endangered because of the anti-colonial struggles in which she was involved. After the completion of her first novel, she worked for many years on an ambitious study of sex and evolution. But her first version of the manuscript was destroyed in a raid on her home by British soldiers. Rewriting the work from scratch, Schreiner published *Woman and Labour* in 1911. Strictly speaking, this book does not follow the generic pattern of those investigations conducted by the male sexologists when tracing the evolution of sexual behaviours and types. Instead, Schreiner's study draws on a similar body of social Darwinism to indicate how and why the future could be transformed to improve middle-class women's lives. The goal of her carefully considered argument is to show that modern society has accrued certain benefits through material progress while creating conditions that fail to ameliorate the longstanding inequality between men and women. The sexes have been torn apart because of the role played by labour among the professional classes in the West. Over time, she argues, men have gained increasing opportunities to work, while women have been separated further and further from useful toil. Focusing solely on middle-class experience, this is how Schreiner puts her case:

Never before in the history of the earth has the man's field of remunerative toil been so wide, so interesting, so complex, and in its results so all-important to society; never before has the male sex, taken as a whole, been so fully and strenuously employed.

So much is this the case, that, exactly as in the earlier conditions of society an excessive and almost crushing amount of the most important physical labour devolved upon the female, so under modern civilized conditions among the wealthier and fully civilized classes, an unduly excessive share of labour tends to devolve upon

the male. That almost entirely modern, morbid condition, affecting the nervous system, and shortening the lives of thousands in modern civilized societies, which is vulgarly known as 'overwork' or 'nervous breakdown', is but one evidence of the even excessive share of mental toil devolving upon the modern male of the cultured classes, who, in addition to maintaining himself, has frequently dependent upon him a larger or smaller number of entirely parasitic females. But, whatever the result of the changes of modern civilization may be with regard to the male, he certainly cannot complain that they have as a whole robbed him of his fields of labour, diminished his share in the conduct of life, or reduced him to a condition of morbid inactivity.

(Schreiner 1911: 48–49)

Even though Schreiner's critical writings are committed to feminist aims, this passage reveals how her thoughts on what she calls 'sex-parasitism' in some ways echo Weininger's conservative reflections on the draining force of female sexuality. It is intriguing that both examine the same phenomenon – the apparent weakening effect of women upon men. But the conclusion Schreiner draws to change this situation could not make a starker contrast with the final judgement reached by Weininger in *Sex and Character*. For she believes there are areas in human life where sex is not even an incidental factor in determining fitness for specific kinds of work: 'The male and female brains acquire languages, solve mathematical problems, and master scientific detail in a manner wholly indistinguishable: as illustrated by the fact that in modern universities the papers sent in by male and female candidates are as a rule absolutely identical in type' (Schreiner 1911: 183).

Yet in staking this claim, Schreiner promptly adds that middle-class women do indeed perform sexually specific forms of labour. Above all, it is the literal labour of childbearing that places such women at the centre of society, and thus plainly shows women's irrefutable significance in perpetuating the race. Schreiner, however, is keen to emphasize that childbearing and motherhood, if necessarily female work, cannot serve as the only form of toil in which bourgeois women should participate. If, at the same time, women are denied access to types of mental

labour, then they will weaken humanity. It is on this issue that Schreiner's evolutionary precepts come into their own:

No man ever yet entered life farther than the length of one navel-cord from the body of the woman who bore him. It is the woman who is the final standard of the race, from which there can be no departure for any distance for any length of time, in any direction: as her brain weakens, weakens the man's she bears; as her muscle softens, softens his; as she decays, decays the people.

Other causes may, and do, lead to the enervation and degeneration of a class or race; the parasitism of its child-bearing women *must*.

(Schreiner 1911: 109)

Here she states that the stronger a woman grows in intellectual and professional competence, the fitter she will be to produce hardy members of the future race. So, on this view, female powers of mind shall fortify heredity, enabling both men and women to partake of a healthier and more equal society.

Women and Labour is one of the foremost feminist tracts of its time. Lucy Bland's comprehensive history of feminist campaigning around sexuality in Britain between the 1880s and the First World War certainly shows that Schreiner was hardly alone among radical women in turning to aspects of eugenic and hereditarian thought (Bland 1995). But, unlike Schreiner, some feminists from this era were preoccupied with the supposed hazards of sexual intercourse with men. In *The Great Scourge and How to End It* (1913), for example, the suffragist Christabel Pankhurst (1880–1958) controversially insisted that women had to be saved from the dangers of marriage because, according to her statistics, a very high percentage of men were infected with venereal disease. Likewise, in *Marriage as a Trade* (1909), Cicely Hamilton (1872–1952) observed that sex and motherhood jeopardized women. From her perspective, celibacy was an admirable alternative to heterosexuality. Even if these views hardly became dominant, they signal how feminist attitudes towards sexual behaviour were diversifying at this time. In this ferment of debate, the figure of the lesbian became more prominent than ever before, suggesting new possibilities for women's sexuality.

The distinguished research of Terry Castle and Lilian Faderman has revealed the rich and varied canon of literary writings that focus on woman-to-woman desire throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Faderman 1981; Castle 1993). If these writers share a common perspective, it lies in how they recognize the hazards in applying modern conceptions of female homosexuality to literary works produced before the twentieth century. Just as sexology created the term sexuality, so too did the word lesbian emerge at a specific historical moment. The naming of the lesbian was not entirely widespread until the 1920s, by which time several European and American cities had established communities and networks for women-loving women. Even during that decade, the novel that brought female same-sex desire to public attention did not refer to lesbianism as such. Instead, in *The Well of Loneliness*, Radclyffe Hall represents its female protagonist, Stephen Gordon, as an invert: the figure representing a third or intermediate sex. Stephen's first name indicates she has a male soul trapped in a woman's body. But the fact that she was given a male name by her father – who desperately hoped for a son – shows that to some degree external factors have also impinged on the remarkable character of Hall's invention. Indeed, the novel charts Stephen's development in a family where she bonds closely with a father who encourages her in athletic pursuits, while remaining distant from a kind but timid mother who presents an extreme form of femininity with which Stephen cannot identify. Throughout the novel, Stephen confronts the severe social pressures against her desire to form intimate relations with other women. Bearing the name of the first Christian martyr, she ultimately sacrifices her deep love for a feminine younger woman, knowing that her girlfriend would be happier and safer in a sexual relationship with a man.

Since the day it was published, *The Well of Loneliness* has remained the most widely read and debated novel of lesbian desire, and Hall's decision to feature a female invert has been an enduring source of controversy. Some readers, for example, believe Stephen's masculine bearing perpetuates a negative stereotype of butch lesbianism, while others claim that Hall's unapologetic

protagonist is an empowering figure who defies the dominant sexual order. Likewise, Hall's conservative politics have made some readers cast doubt on her representation of the woman-loving woman. Yet, at the same time, Hall's work has remained politically important, especially for feminists concerned with the terms on which women might resist heterosexual norms. In a notable essay first published in 1984, Esther Newton takes the latter view: 'Hall, like the sexologists, uses cross-dressing and gender reversal to symbolize lesbian sexuality. Unlike the sexologists, however, Hall makes Stephen the subject and takes her point of view against a hostile world' (Newton 1989: 290). Even though Stephen, for all her upper-class privilege, experiences considerable emotional cruelty, Hall's novel shows that the invert's desires have both pride and dignity. Reflecting on the 'narrow-hipped, wide-shouldered' body she has inhabited from birth (Hall 1981: 13), Stephen refuses to internalize the animosity aimed against her female masculinity:

All her life she must drag this body of hers like a monstrous fetter imposed on her spirit. This strangely ardent yet sterile body that must worship yet never be worshipped in return by the creature of its adoration. She longed to maim it, for it made her feel cruel; it was so white, so strong and so self-sufficient; yet withal so poor and unhappy a thing that her eyes filled with tears and her hate turned to pity. She began to grieve over it, touching her breasts with pitiful fingers, stroking her shoulders, letting her hands slip along her straight thighs – Oh, poor and most desolate body!

(Hall 1981: 187)

This stirring passage captures a marked psychological conflict. Even though Stephen sees herself as physiologically 'sterile', she none the less insists she is emotionally 'ardent', filled with the capacity to love. If no one else shall adore her, then she herself will find the resources to respect her seemingly wounded body. In fact, Stephen finally experiences physical love in an episode that the novel treats with the greatest discretion. Just at the moment she has drawn her lover close to her, the narrator quietly adds: 'and that night they were not divided' (Hall 1981: 313).

In a novel extending to well over 400 pages, these are the only words that hint at sexual intimacy between women.

But the very suggestion of lesbian sexuality was enough to unleash remarkable animosity from the reactionary *Sunday Express*. Such was the controversy sparked off by the virulent moralistic attack on Hall's writing that the Director of Public Prosecutions brought the charge of 'obscene libel' against *The Well of Loneliness*. In her fine study of lesbian cultures, literature and style, Laura Doan cautions against reading this legal furore as wholly representative of a 1920s antipathy to lesbianism in Britain (Doan 2001: 4). The London *Times*, for example, reviewed Hall's novel favourably, and a number of popular novels from the period – one thinks of *Dusty Answer* (1927) by Rosamond Lehmann (1901–90) – feature lesbian characters. Yet what is significant about the trial at the Magistrates' Court in Bow Street was that it gathered together many writers whose own work was seeking to represent proscribed sexual identifications. E.M. Forster (1879–1971) and Virginia Woolf (1884–1941) jointly wrote a letter to the press in Hall's defence. Both Woolf's experimental narrative *Orlando* (1928) and Forster's novel *A Passage to India* (1924) have a conspicuous interest in patterns of same-sex desire. Neither work, however, featured explicitly homosexual protagonists. Forster suppressed his novel, *Maurice* (composed 1913), on the basis that the public was not ready to ready its depiction of love-affairs between men. (Forster's novel appeared shortly after his death.) Forster also withheld from publication his short stories featuring violent homoerotic fantasies (on these, see Lane 1995: 145–75). It is fair to claim that no other writer in the 1920s experienced such public vilification as Hall for her dissident sexuality. The ferocious public response assuredly bore out the moral message of her novel – that lesbians would be martyred in British society. Undoubtedly, the much-publicized trial, which came as a huge shock to Hall, gave the impression that the lesbian embodied a signal threat to a culture that was more and more unsettled by women's demands for autonomy both inside and outside the patriarchal family.

After this period, feminist responses to sexology changed as debates about sexuality shifted in themselves. In this context, one

of the most vexed areas of discussion from the mid-century has been the relationship between women's sexual freedom and heterosexual desire. These debates intensified since the 1940s with sexological research placing increasing emphasis on the need to maximize erotic potential, culminating in the libertarian sexual revolution of the 1960s. On the one hand, feminist arguments have been put forward in favour of rejecting men, not least because the demand for women to sexualize themselves deepens the already exploitative framework of heterosexuality. Inspired by works such as Jill Johnston's *Lesbian Nation* (1973), the separatist movement known as political lesbianism produced a forceful critique of how heterosexuality involved 'sleeping with the enemy' – on the grounds that this hegemonic institution continued women's sexual subordination. On the other hand, the 1990s witnessed a renewed discussion which maintained that feminism and heterosexuality were not exactly incompatible, since women were in a stronger position to take control of their intimate lives with men.

Lynne Segal is among the leading critics to consider how feminism has contended with the contradictory legacy of sexological thought. Charting the influence of sex advice manuals from the time of Stopes's *Married Love*, Segal considers how researchers such as Kinsey in the 1940s, as well as William H. Masters and Virginia E. Johnson in the 1960s, left women with two opposing ideas about female sexuality. Kinsey, for example, stressed the significance of sexual pleasure for women, arguing that clitoral stimulation rather than vaginal penetration was central to achieving orgasm. Yet the biological imperatives driving his research deflected him from social problems in opposite-sex relations, notably how heterosexual intercourse could well involve women's coercion by men, leading to oppressive relationships, unwanted pregnancies, and disease (see Segal 1994: 92). But despite their shortcomings, as Segal notes, Kinsey's reports (1948, 1953) and Masters and Johnson's *Human Sexual Response* (1966) enabled a later generation of feminist sexologists to produce material that stressed the significance of women's rights to enjoy sexual pleasure – and, what is more, pleasure on women's own terms.

None the less, some feminist sex research of the 1970s was still hampered by the restrictive behaviourist framework that claimed

orgasm was the ultimate goal of sexuality. Segal shows how, for instance, in *For Yourself: The Fulfilment of Female Sexuality* (1975), Lonnie Barbach confidently asserts that women can always 'recondition themselves to respond positively to erotic stimuli'. Here is how Segal sums up her reservations about this type of feminist engagement with the sexological demand to 'recondition' the sexually responsive body:

What is disowned with such casual cheeriness is all interest in a woman's complex emotional life, here reduced instead to her cognitive awareness of what is seen as her biological potential for orgasms, and her right to have them. There is no hint or whisper of the often troubling, irrational or 'perverse' nature of sexual desire and fantasy, which may bear little relation to our conscious ideals and commitments as autonomous agents in the world. ... What arouses desire, as almost any women's fiction can illustrate, rarely obeys the dictate of conscious feminist pursuit, but as often includes inappropriately submissive, aggressive, hostile, or in other ways 'deviant' impulses. Yet in sexology, feminist or otherwise, all experience is seen as manipulable, from the outside in, and the possibility of desire arising from and expressing contradictory, conflicting or quite literally impossible impulses cannot even be expressed, let alone explained, within this framework.

(Segal 1994: 104)

Time and again, argues Segal, twentieth-century sexology misleadingly assumes that sexuality is purely a physical matter that involves external stimuli that must lead to orgasmic results. On this view, sexology regards the human body like a desiring machine, with its erogenous zones aroused for the one climactic performance that exclusively defines sexual success. Since its beginnings, then, sexology has been far too focused on classifying sexual types and measuring sexual behaviours, setting norms and targets for each. Even if sexology has over time shifted away from pathologizing certain sexual desires by placing more and more emphasis on the primacy of individual erotic satisfaction, it cannot comprehend how sexuality may exceed, defy, and confound bodily function. That is why Segal closes her study by

demanding a new 'gender order' in which we can 'fashion new concepts and practices of gender based upon the mutual recognition of similarities and differences between women and men, rather than upon notions of their opposition' (Segal 1994: 317). No doubt this as yet unrealized 'gender order' will come into view once our culture no longer believes that popular sexology holds out the promise of a better and more satisfying erotic life.

CONSUMING PASSIONS

Given the persistence of sexology during the past hundred years, readers are probably left wondering exactly what gave rise to this type of research in the first place, and why it has enjoyed such lasting influence. Why should it be in this period that sexuality found a name? And why were theorists impelled to go to such strenuous lengths to make sense of sexual difference and erotic desire? Answers to these urgent questions have been the subject of far less debate than one might expect. In fact, it remains the case that even the more distinguished of the many historical accounts of sexual science repeatedly fail to tell us why this body of knowledge developed as it did. For example, in their impressively well-documented work, *The Facts of Life*, Porter and Hall conclude they have only been able to draw 'a rather coarse diagram to indicate some of the kinds of ideas floating around at particular historical moments in a particular national context upon which individuals have drawn to make their own "sexual knowledge", their sense of the "facts of life"' (Porter and Hall 1995: 283). Such a 'coarse diagram' at times makes it difficult to see how and why an explicit discourse of sexuality came into its own. Admittedly, they acknowledge that 'sexuality could not exist in the culture without words, images, metaphors and symbols to represent it' (Porter and Hall 1995: 8). Yet, even though they pay careful attention to this general point, it is still the case that Porter and Hall's highly detailed research leaves one puzzled about why in the late Victorian era the emergent term sexuality became such a significant topic of scientific investigation.

Rather than assume that there must have been one originating cause that spurred these sexological inquiries into action, it would

be advisable to think about the upsurge of interest in sexuality being overdetermined: that is, emanating from multiple sources that constellated together in textbooks of the kind I have been discussing. No one could deny that evolutionary and eugenic thought, the intensification of women's campaigns for the suffrage, and the development of sexually dissident subcultures all had a part to play in establishing this area of inquiry. But these interrelated developments might make more sense if one could find a model that identified some of their common features.

One of the few studies that attempts to do this is Lawrence Birken's *Consuming Desire: Sexual Science and the Emergence of a Culture of Abundance, 1871–1914* (1988). Birken's concise book locates scientific studies of sexuality within a history of philosophical ideas. His argument focuses on how the emergence of the Enlightenment category of the individual in bourgeois society altered how people thought about their economic relations with the world. Given the advancement of property ownership, the individual had increasing opportunities to enter into free economic relations with other individuals. Thus, economies of consumption became fundamental to relations of production, as Western culture placed more stress on choice, pleasure and taste. On this model, 'sexology conceived of a wider society in which idiosyncratic consumers freely entered into erotic relations with each other' (Birken 1988: 49). Therefore, masochism, even if condemned as pathological, could at some level be perceived as a kind of sexual taste. But, as Birken notes, the freedoms afforded by emergent market principles made for individual subjects whose psychological idiosyncrasies could threaten the social order as a whole. An increasing emphasis on autonomy met with a corresponding response for more regulatory laws to control the potential anarchy unleashed by the proliferation of individual desires. The following sentences pursue this point:

As economic man realized his freedom only by submitting to the law of the market, so psychological man and woman realize their freedom only by submitting to the law of the sexual market.

In other words, sexology simultaneously discovered and attempted to regulate the idiosyncratic consumer. On the one hand, sexual

science emphasized the multiplicity of individual preferences and thus the uniqueness of each person's 'consumption bundle' or 'case'. So the American physician Frank Lydston argued, around 1890, that 'as we may have variations of physical form and of mental attributes, so we have variations and perversions ... of sexual affinity'. On the other hand, the sexologists attempted to subjugate these varied desires to an immanent law of sex.

(Birken 1988: 49)

If one considers patterns of cultural consumption in the economic realm more broadly, it becomes clear that nineteenth-century society enlarged the concept that a human subject could be what it desired. The notion that the subject expresses desire through the power to consume can be understood in general developments visible in nineteenth- and twentieth-century culture – from purchasing goods in department stores to obtaining an ever-broadening range of sexual commodities, such as pornography. At the same time, late-Victorian feminist campaigns for the right of middle-class women to obtain professional work points to a related aspect of a society that made increasingly close associations between sexual desire and economic power. 'Give us labour!' demands Schreiner, on behalf of her sex (Schreiner 1911: 33). In stating that women have a fundamental reproductive labour to perform, Schreiner is also insisting that women should have a fair share of the market: the world in which female professional workers can thrive for the good of everyone.

Compared to Birken, John D'Emilio provides a similar, if more obviously Marxist, analysis of market forces and desire. In his classic essay, 'Capitalism and Gay Identity' (1983), D'Emilio does not explicitly address the rise of sexology but the framework he develops certainly hold some clues to why sexual minorities became more visible in the nineteenth century, and thus made themselves subjects of scientific inquiry. Keen to quash any notion of the 'eternal homosexual', he combats such essentialist suppositions by considering why gay subcultures developed in the context of the 'free-labour system' that emerged under nineteenth-century American capitalism (D'Emilio 1992: 5). He examines how the white family slowly changed its status from an

independent unit of production that formed the cornerstone of society to a grouping that cultivated the affections of its members. No longer was the family 'an institution that provided goods' but one that offered 'emotional satisfaction and happiness' (D'Emilio 1992: 7). As a consequence, marriage shifted its emphasis from procreation to being an institution that nurtured children. Given that capitalism changed the structure of the family, creating divisions between the public world of work and private domestic life, the possibility arose for men and women to create intimate relations that might depart from familial arrangements. D'Emilio argues that growing opportunities to sell one's labour in contexts outside the self-supporting family meant that alternative sexual styles of living became available to many more people than before, especially in urban centres.

Yet given the pronounced hostility to homosexuality under this phase of late capitalism, D'Emilio has to address the structural contradiction between the mode of economic production and the reigning morals of the day. Here is how he approaches this problem.

[T]he relationship between capitalism and the family is fundamentally contradictory. On the one hand, capitalism continually weakens the material foundation of family life, making it possible for individuals to live outside the family, and for a lesbian and gay male identity to develop. On the other, it needs to push men and women into families, at least long enough to reproduce the next generation of workers. The elevation of the family to ideological preeminence guarantees that a capitalist society will reproduce not just children, but heterosexism and homophobia.

(D'Emilio 1992: 13)

Put another way, just as changing economic circumstances permit dissident sexualities to emerge, so too do they consolidate the pressure on the family to reproduce itself. But there are noticeable limitations to this Marxist approach. How does one balance the development of homosexual subcultures against the increase of homophobia? Is it the case that the prevailing morals might be lagging behind the changing relations of production? Or is it that the rather unpredictable condition of the free labour market

inspired a strict morality that gave society a sense of control over its destiny? In D'Emilio's thought-provoking essay, such questions remain unanswered. Ultimately, it remains hard to see precisely why lesbians and gay men, producing their own networks under the changing free labour economy, have simultaneously become 'the political victims of the social instability that capitalism generates' (D'Emilio 1992: 13).

In some respects, it could be argued that Birken's and D'Emilio's respective essays suffer from differing degrees of economic determinism: that is, the belief that economic changes necessarily dictate all other social and cultural relations. This mode of thinking can become inflexibly functionalist in its approach to sexual phenomena. In assuming that a specific set of economic causes has identifiable cultural effects, such analyses suggest that the contradictory dynamic between homosexuality and homophobia is a wholly external matter. Even though economic history can throw light on how sexual dissidents forged their communities in specific capitalist conditions, its methods are surely as limited as those of sexology in defining the complex mechanisms that generate erotic identifications. Neither theory can altogether elucidate how the family produces persons whose desires might not comply with celebrated heterosexual ideals.

So where else might theorists look for analytic models that will help explain the intense conflict between heterosexual dominance and homosexual dissidence? What other tools might there be to consider the conditions that give rise to many different sexual identities and behaviours? One of the most influential alternatives has been psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis is a critical method and clinical practice that examines many of the phenomena that fascinated the sexologists but which locates their origins in a previously unexplored domain: the unconscious mind. Invented by Freud and developed further by Lacan, psychoanalysis questions what sexology singularly fails to illuminate: how the psyche organizes the sexual drives, often in socially rebellious ways. The next chapter reveals how psychoanalytic research pioneered a distinctive ensemble of critical terms that enabled it to leave sexology well and truly behind.

2

PSYCHOANALYTIC DRIVES

FREUD'S COMPLEXES

'According to the prevailing view', wrote Sigmund Freud near the end of his career, 'sexual life consists essentially in an endeavour to bring one's own genitals into contact with those of someone of the opposite sex' (Freud 1964, XXIII: 152). Moreover, he states that the conventional 'prevailing view' assumes the desire for opposite-sex relations emerges at puberty and leads to its natural consequence: reproduction. But, as Freud proceeds to observe, there are 'certain facts' that 'do not fit into the narrow framework of this view'. He adds that, although heterosexual intercourse may appear to be the necessary result of normal development in human beings, three significant phenomena show that eroticism extends well beyond the scope of the reproductive capacities of sexually mature adults. First, there is the widespread existence of homosexuality. Second, there are people classified as 'perverts', whose desires 'behave exactly like sexual ones but who at the same time entirely disregard the sexual organs or their normal use'. And third, there is the question of why young children frequently take an interest in their genitals

and experience excitation in them. Once these 'three neglected facts' have been taken into account, then the following findings become clear:

- (1) sexual life begins during infancy;
- (2) the 'sexual' and the 'genital' have separate meanings, since the 'sexual' encompasses many behaviours that are not 'genital' in character; and
- (3) sexual pleasure involves the development of erogenous zones, ones that may or may not lead to reproduction.

These, in sum, are the decisively innovative findings of Freud's psychoanalytic investigations. Controversial from the outset, the critical repercussions of the models he used to theorize these insights can be felt to this day. This chapter shows why.

Dating from 1938, these summative remarks by Freud appear in 'An Outline of Psycho-Analysis', the unfinished manuscript where he brings together in concise and accessible form the fruits of his longstanding researches into the psychic life of the subject. Psychoanalysis, after all, had begun, more than half a century before, in the 1880s. Trained as a neuroscientist at the University of Vienna, Freud in his early work from that decade was devoted to medical issues such as motor paralyses. Included in these writings were studies of hypnotism and hysteria. The direction of his research changed dramatically during a period of study at La Salpêtrière clinic in Paris where he witnessed the distinguished physician Jean Martin Charcot (1825–93) employ hypnosis apparently to cure hysterical symptoms in women patients. Throughout the next ten years, much of his time was devoted to the study of hysteria, and he gradually dissented from Charcot's innovative belief that hysteria could be understood as a neurological disease. Drawing an entirely different conclusion, Freud produced a substantial work with his senior colleague, Josef Breuer (1842–1925), comprising five case histories which revealed why hysterical symptoms had their sources in conflicted sexual feelings. Published in 1895, *Studies in Hysteria* set the stage for Freud's deepening inquiries into the psychic realm he called the unconscious.

Freud's next major study, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), makes a radical claim on the ways in which the unconscious exists in parallel with the conscious mind but operates according to a distinct logic of its own. Unlike the conscious mind, which functions under the rational orders demanded by culture, the unconscious is the psychic domain that has undergone the arduous but ineluctable process of repression. To ensure the subject can function as successfully as possible in the world, mechanisms of repression necessarily come into play. It is through repression that desires and wishes forbidden to consciousness are deposited in the unconscious. That is not to say, however, that the unconscious remains completely debarred from the conscious mind. To the contrary, the unconscious makes its presence frequently known through such phenomena as parapraxes or slips of the tongue (commonly termed 'Freudian slips'), memories of dreams (which enact unconscious wishfulfilments), and gestures (ones that betray what the conscious mind is obliged to repress). Psychoanalysis, both as a body of theory and a clinical practice, could not operate without placing these visual and corporeal signs under careful scrutiny, thereby gaining interpretative access to the remote but none the less decipherable activity of the unconscious.

This pathbreaking theory of the unconscious provides one of the main supports to the innovative account of sexuality Freud first elaborated in 1905, and which would absorb much of his attention for the remainder of his career. Published in that year, his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* discloses how the unconscious becomes the turbulent zone where diverse sexual drives have to be repressed so that the human subject maintains its identity. The first phase of this process occurs early in infantile life, its second phase during puberty, and between the two there is a period of latency. (Hence Freud calls this a *diphasic* model of sexual development.) But, as Freud repeatedly shows, the sexual identity initially taken up by the infant is the result of a far from easy process, since it refuses to obey any preordained path of development. By stressing continually how biological instincts cannot have exclusive rights in determining sexuality, Freud argues that the infant's body becomes sexualized through ambivalent psychic responses to the anatomical distinction

between the sexes. To understand the complex identifications through which the infant must pass in the formation of sexuality, Freud theorized two interdependent structures: the Oedipus complex; and the castration complex. Given greatest detail in several later papers, published during the 1920s and 1930s, these two complexes never ceased to stretch beyond Freud's formidable analytic reach. In many respects, the Oedipus and castration complexes became both his main preoccupation and his most enduring problem. Suggestive yet schematic, ingenious yet infuriating, they provide two of the main foundations to Freud's explorations of sexuality. Comprehending the implications of each complex, however, can prove difficult because they emerge in piecemeal fashion throughout his voluminous later writings, first in footnotes appended to four subsequent editions of the *Three Essays* (the last appearing in 1924), and then in scattered papers such as 'The Dissolution of Oedipus Complex' (1924) and 'Female Sexuality' (1931). So it is vital to remember that no single book or essay by Freud provides a total picture of his reflections on sexuality.

To appreciate exactly how Freud's work broke with earlier sexological models of desire and laid the foundations for the Oedipus and castration complexes, it is useful to look first of all at the innovative lines of inquiry he started to pursue in the *Three Essays*. The essays deal in turn with 'The Sexual Aberrations', 'Infantile Sexuality' and 'Transformations of Puberty'. In examining the 'sexual aberrations', Freud abstracts some overarching points about the case histories compiled by sexologists such as Havelock Ellis and Richard von Krafft-Ebing, particularly these researchers' analyses of sexual inversion or homosexuality (on both writers, see Chapter 1). Having summarized these sexologists' discoveries, Freud concludes that it is impossible to make hard and fast distinctions between 'congenital' and 'acquired' forms of inversion, since there are many sexual experiences shared by homosexuals and heterosexuals in early life. Similarly, he casts serious doubt on Karl Heinrich Ulrichs's belief that male inverts contained a female brain in a male body, remarking that science remains unsure about precisely what might constitute a 'feminine brain' (Freud 1953: VII, 142). That said, Freud entertains the

idea – one that will become increasingly significant for him – that inversion might be a form of psychic bisexuality (that is, combining feminine and masculine attributes), largely because this concept accentuates a distinction between sexual instinct and sexual object. (At this point, it is worth noting that in the original German, Freud employs the word *Trieb* rather than *Instinkt*. *Trieb* roughly translates as drive, while *Instinkt* correlates with the biological sense of instinct. There are ongoing debates among students of Freud's work that focus on whether one should refer to sexual 'drives' or 'instincts', especially since his theory of sexuality sought to detach itself from biological determinism. [On this issue, see Bowie 1991: 161.] 'It seems probable', writes Freud, 'that the sexual instinct is in the first instance independent of its object; nor is its origin likely to be due to its object's attraction' (Freud 1953: VII, 148). In other words, sexual inversion indicates that there might be arbitrary connections between initial erotic drives, on the one hand, and eventual libidinal attachments, on the other hand.

By way of clarifying this point, Freud explains how even 'normal sexual life' – namely, that which leads to heterosexual intercourse – involves behaviours that do not have a direct function in the reproductive process. Such 'preliminary' or 'intermediate' sexual aims, argues Freud, include touching and looking at the sexual object, leading to extremely pleasurable activities such as kissing. Seen in the cold light of dispassionate science, he states, kissing could well be viewed as a 'perversion'. Why? It is so because 'the parts of the body involved do not form part of the sexual apparatus but constitute the entrance to the digestive tract' (Freud 1953: VII, 150). On this basis, Freud finds it possible to substantiate the claim that many different parts of the body can become sites of intense sexual valuation. Even though disgust may interfere with a person's response to a specific body part (such as the mouth, the genitals or the anus), it remains the case that the libido may well override the revulsion that convention often attributes to these somatic zones. To show what he means, Freud focuses on the customary abhorrence of the anus, the organ most frequently associated with male homosexuality. He indicates that the horror that anal intercourse often arouses in

people is somewhat illogical. But as the following remarks reveal, in making this bold assertion Freud is not entirely averse to sexism:

Where the anus is concerned it becomes still clearer that it is disgust which stamps that sexual aim as a perversion. I hope, however, I shall not be accused of partisanship when I assert that people who try to account for this disgust by saying that the organ in question serves the function of excretion and comes in contact with excrement – a thing which is disgusting in itself – are not much more to the point than hysterical girls who account for their disgust at the male genital by saying that it serves to void urine.

(Freud 1953: VII, 152)

Each body part, therefore, can be interpreted in a striking variety of ways – even, it seems, by ‘hysterical girls’. They can serve biological functions, become erogenous zones and represent sites of disgust. From this perspective even the penis, which has a natural reproductive capacity, is potentially an object of revulsion. In sexual terms, then, the human body has many features that may be loved or loathed, esteemed or scorned, depending on the disposition of the subject.

But body parts, in all their multifariousness, are hardly the only objects onto which libidinal attachments are made. Freud promptly notes how fetishes – ‘such as the foot or hair’ or ‘some inanimate object’ – substitute for the sexual object, a point he embellishes much later in his paper titled ‘Fetishism’ (1927). Rather like kissing, which has no direct purpose in reproduction, fetishism is present in heterosexual love. To prove his point, Freud quotes the following lines from Goethe’s *Faust* (1808–32): ‘Get me a kerchief from her breast, / A garter that her knee has pressed’ (Freud 1953: VII, 154). Likewise, there are other notable perversions that reveal how sexuality departs from the apparent biological imperative to reproduce. Just as the aforementioned aberrations disclose why the sexual instinct should be separated from the sexual object, so too do masochism and sadism enlarge our understanding of aggression in sexuality. ‘Sadism and masochism’, observes Freud, ‘occupy a special position among the

perversions, since the contrast between activity and passivity which lies behind them is among the universal characteristics of sexual life' (Freud 1953: VII, 159). In no way biologically functional, masochism and sadism push to an extreme familiar types of activity and passivity – and, correspondingly, masculinity and femininity – that are elsewhere normalized by convention in sexual relations between men and women. So rather than consign such perversions to types of illness or degeneracy, Freud contends these erotic behaviours and preferences have a constitutive role in all human sexuality, especially the reproductive heterosexuality that the sexologists were often at pains to differentiate from seemingly unnatural desires.

Consequently, Freud reaches two main conclusions in 'The Sexual Aberrations'. First, he insists that 'the sexual instinct has to struggle against certain mental forces which act as resistances', notably 'forces' such as shame and disgust. The subject, therefore, strives to regulate the sexual instinct through repression. Such regulation, however, is not always victorious in securing the development of 'normal' sexual life. Second, the perversions reveal that the sexual instinct has many discrete, if not disharmonious, sources. In other words, the perversions have 'a composite nature'. 'This gives us', writes Freud, 'a hint that perhaps the sexual instinct may be no simple thing, but put together from components which have come apart again in the perversions' (Freud 1953: VII, 162). Having drawn attention to these matters, Freud's task is to infer: (1) how the subject labours to limit the sexual instinct; and (2) how the sexual instinct itself combines varying, and often conflicting, elements.

How, then, does Freud explore these two hypotheses? To answer this question, it is necessary to look first at some of the salient points made in the second of the *Three Essays*, 'Infantile Sexuality'. There Freud declares that 'germs of the sexual impulses are already present in the new-born child', and these shall go through the first of the two phases that organize human sexuality (Freud 1953: VII, 180). Especially significant is the creation of autoerotic pleasures that retrace the infant's earliest somatic comforts. To illustrate the child's incipient autoeroticism, Freud considers the infantile practice of thumb-sucking. This practice,

he argues, involves re-enacting the joyous activity of breastfeeding. 'There is no question of the purpose of this procedure being the taking of nourishment', he remarks (Freud 1953: VII, 182). Serving no other function than physical comfort, thumb-sucking mimes a 'pleasure that has already been experienced' (Freud 1953: VII, 181). Subsequently, the lips and mucous membrane of the mouth become sites of somatic intensity. The same is true for any other organ of the body. In a footnote added in 1915, Freud remarked: 'I have been led to ascribe the quality of erotogenicity to all parts of the body and to all the internal organs' (Freud 1953: VII, 184). As Freud's remarkable case histories would show, many different areas of the body could become the focus of profound eroticism, neurosis and perversion – the nose, the throat, the stomach, the anus, among them.

But even if Freud asserts that any bodily part has the potential to be eroticized, there are three zones in particular which absorb his attention. In analysing infantile sexuality, he concentrates on the mouth, the anus and the genitals. Each of these areas, he argues, retains the capacity for intense erotogenicity. These somatic areas have an intimate connection with pleasures derived from biological functions. The anal sphincter, for example, becomes highly significant for the child, first when its diapers are changed and then when it learns to defecate at regular intervals. 'Children', writes Freud, 'who are making use of the susceptibility to erotogenic stimulation of the anal zone betray themselves by holding back their stool till its accumulation brings about violent muscular contractions and, as it passes through the anus, is able to produce powerful stimulation of the mucous membrane' (Freud 1953: VII, 186). The production of faeces may well take on an exceptional symbolic significance because it represents the infant's ability to negotiate its relationship with the world – to withhold or to give its faecal mass. Subsequent perversions, such as 'special scatological practices' or 'masturbatory stimulation of the anal zone by means of the finger', can be traced back to this acutely important episode in the infant's life (Freud 1953: VII, 187). Having shown how the infant must advance beyond first oral and then anal erotogenicity, Freud accentuates the infantile pleasure in genital masturbation. Like the anus, this sensitive area

experiences heightened stimulation when rubbed during bathing and cleaning. Masturbation, which may or may not persist until puberty, substitutes for the pleasures derived from this early bodily pleasure. In sum, the erotogenic development of the oral and anal zones marks the 'pregenital' phase of infantile sexuality. Puberty, which witnesses the growth of the genitals, brings about the final phase through which sexuality should pass. Thus we have in place Freud's diphasic model for understanding how sexuality is organized.

In its earliest formation, however, sexuality does not depend solely on autoerotic stimulation of the oral, anal and genital zones. In a section added to 'Infantile Sexuality' in 1915, Freud discusses how children begin their 'sexual researches' between the ages of three to five (Freud 1953: VII, 194). He argues that when children first examine their social worlds, they are preoccupied with only one question: Where do babies come from? This inquiry, we are told, precedes any interest a child might have in the division between the sexes. Yet as the child's 'researches' deepen, the whole issue of sexual difference becomes a source of considerable anxiety. It is at this point that Freud briefly sketches one of the two structures for which his work is notorious: the castration complex. Here is how Freud proposes what happens to boys and girls when they confront symbolic castration:

It is self-evident to a male child that a genital like his own is to be attributed to everyone he knows, and he cannot make its absence tally with his picture of these other people.

This conviction is energetically maintained by boys, is obstinately defended against the contradictions which soon result from observation, and is only abandoned after severe internal struggles (the castration complex). The substitutes for the penis which they feel is missing in women play a great part in determining the form taken by many perversions.

The assumption that all human beings have the same (male) form of genital is the first of the many remarkable and momentous theories of children. It is of little use to a child that the science of biology justifies his prejudice and has been obliged to recognize the female clitoris as a true substitute for the penis.

Little girls do not resort to denial of this kind when they see that boys' genitals are formed differently from their own. They are ready to recognize them immediately and overcome by envy for the penis – an envy culminating in the wish, which is so important in its consequences, to be boys themselves.

(Freud 1953: VII, 195)

Presented in such summary form, the dynamics involved in the castration complex may well look doubtful. Why should the male child initially assume that everyone has a penis? Why should little girls envy this particular part of the male anatomy? And why should children of either sex experience fear at being robbed of this organ? It is frustrating to find that Freud does not supply ready answers. For no sooner have we read these paragraphs than he instantly moves to his next observation: how children witness and interpret scenes of sexual intercourse. It would take Freud at least another decade before he explored the consequences of the castration complex. And, even then, he often remained unclear about the exact role symbolic castration played in the formation of female sexuality – for reasons we shall examine shortly.

In the *Three Essays*, it remains unclear how the castration complex interacts with the Oedipus complex, even though the latter structure emerged as far back as 1897 during Freud's researches for *The Interpretation of Dreams*. One has to look at later works, such as *The Ego and the Id* (1923) and 'The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex' (1924), to understand exactly how boys and girls supposedly follow divergent paths that involve conflicting loves and losses. In these writings, Freud characteristically pays greater attention to the tortuous route taken by the boy than that of the girl, as they head towards 'normal' heterosexuality. Undoubtedly, the boy undergoes a highly conflicted process before he becomes the active, masculine, heterosexual male that society wants him to be.

In theorizing the Oedipus complex, Freud abstracted his paradigm from the great classical tragedy by Sophocles (c. 494–06 BCE). In this drama, the Greek hero kills his father and weds his mother. But Oedipus does so in ignorance. For the tragedy, of

course, lies in how Oedipus does not know until after the event who his parents are. As in all tragedies, there are higher forces at work that determine the fatal path that Oedipus is compelled to take. How, then, does this tragic drama represent the sexual development of Freud's boy? First of all, the male infant discovers that his mother takes measures to inhibit his infantile masturbation. But it takes a while for the boy to understand the reality behind this symbolic castration. In *The Ego and the Id*, Freud explains how the boy must first of all pass through the deeply troubling Oedipus complex:

At a very early age the little boy develops an object-cathexis [i.e. transfer of erotic energy on to an object] for his mother, which originally related to the mother's breast ... ; the boy deals with his father by identifying himself with him. For a time these two relationships proceed side by side, until the boy's sexual wishes in regard to his mother become more intense and his father is perceived as an obstacle to them; from this the Oedipus complex originates. His identification with his father then takes on a hostile colouring and changes into a wish to get rid of his father in order to take his place with his mother. Henceforward his relation to his father is ambivalent; it seems as if this ambivalence inherent in the identification from the beginning had become manifest. An ambivalent attitude to his father and an object-relation of a solely affectionate kind to his mother make up the content of the simple positive Oedipus complex in the boy.

Along with the demolition of the Oedipus complex, the boy's object-cathexis of the mother must be given up. Its place may be filled by one of two things: either an identification with his mother or an intensification of his identification with his father. We are accustomed to regard the latter outcome as the more normal; it permits the affectionate relation to the mother in a measure to be retained. In this way the dissolution of the Oedipus complex would consolidate the masculinity of the boy's character.

(Freud 1961: XIX, 32)

Although for some time he enjoys his phallic phase, the boy soon realizes that he is his father's rival for his mother's love, thus inaugurating the Oedipus complex. This structure of rivalry

places competing demands upon the boy: (1) to love his mother and to hate his father; and (2) to relinquish his love for his mother and to identify with his father. If he negotiates the customary path towards heterosexuality, then the boy will retain affection for his mother while identifying with his father. But in order to achieve this final step, a further stage in the drama must come to a head: the castration complex.

In 'The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex', Freud insists it is the 'acceptance of the possibility of castration, his recognition that women were castrated' that enables the boy's Oedipus complex to come to a close. The castration complex has many implications for the boy: (1) he understands that his mother is not 'phallic' like himself; (2) he cannot love his mother, since that is his father's right; and (3) he must develop alternative libidinal attachments to a female object to secure his identity. Maintaining an identity, however, involves more than establishing the health of the ego, the term Freud uses to define the psychic agency that negotiates between the unconscious forces of the id and the pressures from the external world. Symbolic castration, which manifests itself culturally in the incest taboo, leads to the formation of the superego, the psychic agency that reaches deep into the id to act censoriously against the ego. The superego is where the subject internalizes cultural prohibitions, such as the interdiction against sexual relations between sons and mothers. If the boy eventually identifies with the authority of a paternal superego, then he will enter the period of latency in the years before puberty as a subject predisposed to heterosexual desire.

The picture, however, is markedly different when Freud attempts to explain how the castration and Oedipus complexes operate for girls. Although Freud remarks in *The Ego and the Id* that the Oedipus complex performs in 'a precisely analogous way' for girls (Freud 1961: XIX, 32), the following year in 'The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex' the analogy is altogether less clear ('our material – for some incomprehensible reason – becomes far more obscure and full of gaps' [Freud 1961: XIX, 177]). Only in 1925, in 'Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes', did Freud seek to untangle his views on how girls respond to the threat of castration. And it is

here that we begin to see how boys and girls are hardly placed in a similar relation to the castration complex. For once Freud explains how a girl reacts to the threat of castration, it soon emerges that the absence of the penis marks, not the end, but the *beginning* of her Oedipus complex:

A little girl behaves differently. She makes her judgement and her decision in a flash. She has seen it and knows that she is without it and wants to have it.

Here what has been named the masculinity complex branches off. It may put great difficulties in the way of the regular development towards femininity, if it cannot be got over soon enough. The hope of some day obtaining a penis in spite of everything and so of becoming a man may persist to an incredibly late stage and may become a motive for strange and otherwise unaccountable actions. ... Thus a girl may refuse to accept the fear of being castrated, may harden herself in the conviction that she *does* possess a penis, and may subsequently be compelled to behave as though she were a man. ...

After a woman has become aware of the wound to her narcissism, she develops, like a scar, a sense of inferiority. When she has passed beyond her first attempt at explaining her lack of a penis as being a punishment personal to herself and has realized that that sexual character is a universal one, she begins to share the contempt felt by men for a sex which is the lesser in so important a respect, and, at least in holding that opinion, insists on being like a man.

(Freud 1961: XIX, 253)

Even though the boy must pass along a tormented route through what Freud frequently terms the 'positive' Oedipus complex towards 'normal' heterosexuality, the girl has to travel a much more arduous path towards the same destination. Indeed, in this essay, everything for the girl goes from bad to worse. The conflict she experiences comes about because of an imbalance between the masculine and feminine, active and passive, aspects to her psyche. By this point in his work, Freud is assured that in infancy all subjects have a bisexual disposition that permits the interplay between active and passive desires. If the girl's masculinity

complex comes into its own, then she will not only hold her sex in contempt, but also discover great disappointment in the auto-erotic satisfactions derived from clitoral stimulation. How, then, will the girl get through this castration complex? What will lead her out of this drastic situation?

The answer, Freud assures us, is the Oedipus complex. But since the drama on which this complex was modelled involves a male protagonist, it may come as no surprise that Freud found it difficult to rework the Oedipal paradigm to explain the girl's sexual life. (Repeatedly, he repudiated the idea that one could dramatize the girl's experience in terms of a model drawn from an alternative Greek myth, the 'Electra complex'.) Committing himself to the explanatory power of Oedipus' tragedy, Freud finds it hard indeed to clarify the precise sequence that leads from the girl's masculinity to the feminine disposition required for heterosexual desire. Having wanted to be a man, claims Freud, the girl must accept that 'she cannot compete with boys and that it would therefore be best for her to give up the idea of doing so' (Freud 1961: XIX, 256). She becomes, in other words, resigned to her femininity, and thus discovers an appropriate substitute for the penis she has lost. How is this done? 'She gives up her wish for a penis and puts in place of it a wish for a child: and with *that purpose in view* she takes her father as a love-object'. Disillusioned with her clitoris, she focuses instead upon her vagina. With this somatic shift of interest, she can at last move out of her masculine phase to fulfil what is culturally expected of femininity.

But given that the Oedipus complex is now in place between herself and her father, nothing has been resolved for sure. In the case of girls, then, the Oedipal phase remains incomplete at best. All Freud can say about this unresolved state of affairs is that the 'Oedipus complex may persist far into women's normal life' (Freud 1961: XIX, 257). For some reason, the girl may well stubbornly refuse to break her libidinal attachments from the father, since it is he who promises the child that reinstates the lost penis. There is every possibility that her development shall be arrested at this stage. Later, he would reiterate this point in no uncertain terms. 'Girls', he remarks in 'Femininity' (1933),

'remain' in the Oedipus complex 'for an indeterminate length of time; they demolish it late and, even so, incompletely'. Left to linger in the Oedipal phase, the girl's superego may endure without 'the strength and independence which give it its cultural significance'. Recognizing the controversial implications of this assertion, Freud acknowledges how 'feminists are not pleased when we point out to them the effects of this factor upon the average feminine character' (Freud 1964: XXII, 129).

Freud was the first to admit that his twin complexes did not always serve femininity well, even though he steadfastly maintained his commitment to the analytic power of both models. In both 'Female Sexuality' (1931) and 'Femininity' (written two years later), he found it especially difficult to clear up the puzzling questions about female sexuality first raised in the paper he published in 1925. In 'Female Sexuality', two questions guide his discussion. 'How does she [the girl] find her way to her father? How, when and why does she detach herself from the mother?' (Freud 1961: XXI, 225). Having summarized more or less everything he said six years previously, Freud remains troubled by how and why the girl must turn against her mother, often in intensely hostile ways. His fascination lies in the girl's pre-Oedipal phase, a period he suggestively compares to 'the discovery, in another field, of Minoan–Mycenean civilization behind the civilization of Greece' (Freud 1961: XXI, 226). This comparison implies that female sexuality has an archaic and inscrutable quality, rendering it only partly accessible to coherent analysis. Persistently, Freud searches for reasons that will account for the rupture with the mother that must occur in this early period of the girl's sexual life. 'What does the little girl require of her mother?' he asks. 'What is the nature of her sexual aims during the time of exclusive attachment to her mother?' (Freud 1961: XXI, 235).

By way of a response, Freud claims that the little girl experiences both active and passive drives, drawing attention once more to the bisexual disposition of infants. Take, for instance, being suckled. Where the child at first experiences the passive pleasure of being nourished from the breast, it will later enjoy active sucking. Here activity and passivity correspond with masculine

and feminine impulses. To illustrate his point, Freud discusses how we might construe the pleasure girls often take in playing with dolls:

We seldom hear of a little girl's wanting to wash or dress her mother, or tell her to perform her excretory functions. Sometimes, it is true, she says: 'Now let's play that I'm the mother and you're the child'; but generally she fulfils these active wishes in an indirect way, in her play with the doll, in which she represents the mother and the doll the child. The fondness girls have for playing with dolls, in contrast to boys, is commonly regarded as a sign of early awakened femininity. Not unjustly so; but we must not overlook the fact that what finds expression here is the active side of femininity, and that the little girl's preference for dolls is probably evidence of the exclusiveness of her attachment to her mother, with complete neglect of her father-object.

(Freud 1961: XXI, 237)

In explaining the links between femininity, activity and passivity, this intriguing example suggests some interesting complications in Freud's scheme. Although he frequently equates masculinity with activity, and femininity with passivity, here he asks us to bear in mind the 'active side of femininity'. This formulation may, according to some of his principles, sound like a contradiction in terms, a contradiction to which he would return in his later lecture, 'Femininity', published in 1933 (see Freud 1964: XXII, 115). Yet no sooner has Freud shown how this active – and thus masculine – femininity reveals how the girl identifies with the mother's desires than he emphasizes a very different type of active behaviour that will gradually distance the girl from the mother. He believes that such distance is required so that the girl will at last become feminine at puberty. To strengthen this view, Freud reports how his female patients have at times divulged their phallic, and thus active, belligerence towards the maternal figure, often because these patients have revealed how in their infantile lives they lived in fear of being devoured by her. And when, according to Freud, the girl is not anxious about being consumed by the mother, then she fantasizes about eating up the maternal source of nourishment itself.

Keen to stress exactly why the 'turning-away from her mother is an extremely important step in the course of a little girl's development' (Freud 1961: XXI, 239), Freud puts pressure on how the girl experiences the sadistic-aggressive impulses of the phallic phase, impulses which culminate in infantile clitoral masturbation. Yet the active dimension to the phallic phase cannot have full rein if the girl is to achieve the culturally required norm of femininity. During this period, he claims, there are also passive drives that significantly accompany these distinctly active ones. 'In regard to the passive impulses', he remarks, 'it is noteworthy that girls regularly accuse their mother of seducing them' (Freud 1961: XXI, 238). Both here and elsewhere, Freud declares the fantasy of seduction arises because the mother stimulates the genitals while rubbing them clean. (Early in his career, Freud concluded that those of his patients who claimed to have been seduced by their parents in infancy were suffering from a commonplace fantasy that recalled the subject's enduringly difficult negotiation with the world. His decision to claim that seduction was an imagined event, not a real experience of abuse, remains a source of controversy. See, for example, Masson 1984.) Ultimately, passive trends such as the fantasy of seduction will remain sufficiently intact to enable the girl to convert her libidinal attachments to the father-object. For the girl eventually recognizes that her active desires simply cannot be realized. Even though the arrival of a newborn child in the family may suggest to the girl that she has given her mother a baby, she finally has to confront the fact that she cannot rival her father's phallic authority. So, once again, it is in a spirit of compromise that the girl's femininity falls into place. To comprehend female sexuality, therefore, Freud's readers have to bear in mind the following: (1) how the Oedipus complex succeeds the girl's castration complex; (2) how the phallic phase involves both active and passive impulses; and (3) how masculine trends must eventually flow into feminine channels. In the process, the femininity that is finally gained comes at a price, since 'a considerable portion of her sexual trends is permanently injured too' (Freud 1961: XXI, 239).

Freud's writings on femininity, if striving to maintain consistency within the terms of the castration and Oedipus

complexes, are notable for what they refuse to entertain, as if they were acting out their own systematic repressions. To conclude this review of Freud's theoretical work on sexuality, it is useful to note how he selectively interprets female same-sex desire in a detailed case history published in 1920. In 'The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman', Freud discusses how a 'beautiful and clever girl of eighteen' troubled her parents when they discovered she was consorting in public with an older woman known by many as a '*cocotte*' (Freud 1955: XVIII, 147). When her father accidentally met them in public and flashed them an angry glance, the young woman attempted suicide by flinging herself down an embankment next to a railway line. Six months later, she was placed in Freud's hands for treatment. During her analysis with Freud, the young woman revealed that at the age of thirteen or fourteen she became closely attached to a young boy who was not quite three years old. Freud claims this relationship betokened her desire to be a mother and have a child of her own. But for some reason, she grew bored with the child, developing instead 'an interest in mature, but still youthful, women' (Freud 1955: XVIII, 156). We learn that this shift of attention occurred when her mother once again became pregnant. The young woman's third brother was born when she was about sixteen. Putting her dreams under scrutiny, Freud believed that this patient's 'lady-love was a substitute for – her mother'. Why should this be? Here is how Freud spells out his explanation:

It was just when the girl was experiencing the revival of her infantile Oedipus complex at puberty that she suffered her greatest disappointment. She became keenly conscious of the wish to have a child, and a male one; that what she desired was her *father's* child and an image of *him*, her consciousness was not allowed to know. And what happened next? It was not *she* who bore the child, but her unconsciously hated rival, her mother. Furiously resentful and embittered, she turned away from her father and from men altogether. After this first great reverse she forswore her womanhood and sought another goal for her libido.

(Freud 1955: XVIII, 157)

Having 'changed' – as Freud puts it – 'into a man' (Freud 1955: XVIII, 158), the young woman, we learn, intensified her libidinal choice when she realized the depth of her father's hostility. In fact, her homosexuality appeared to Freud as a protest against her father, who had won over her in their rivalry for the mother's affections. Indeed, Freud regards her behaviour as a form of 'revenge' against the paternal prerogative to love the mother (Freud 1955: XVIII, 160). So deep was her enmity towards her father that during the course of her analysis she 'transferred to [Freud] the sweeping repudiation of men which had dominated her ever since the disappointment she had suffered from her father' (Freud 1955: XVIII, 164). Given the force of this transference, Freud broke off the treatment, believing that only a woman analyst could complete the task successfully. To be sure, this intriguing text reveals that his analytic skills were pushed beyond their limit.

This richly detailed case history is fascinating because it shows how hard Freud tried and failed to resolve what faced him as the Sphinx-like 'riddle' or 'enigma' of femininity (Freud 1964: XXII, 113, 131). Repeatedly, this narrative yields insights into women's desires that Freud either could not or would not pursue. At the centre of the case there lies one interpretative crux that Freud fails to examine. It remains unclear whether the young woman's desire for another woman depends on (1) her identification with her father's privileged love for the mother, or (2) her reawakened pre-Oedipal attachment to the maternal body. Noticeably, both of her parents are, at different stages of the case history, her rivals. Yet they are, at the same time, figures with whom she identifies (to be a mother, to be a man).

Given the many possible identifications suggested by the scenario Freud depicts, Diana Fuss usefully raises the following questions:

[W]hy is it presumed from the outset that desire for the mother is a displaced articulation of unfulfilled desire for the father, and not the other way around? Why is the daughter's 'disappointment' imagined to be provoked by her inability to have the father's baby and not her failure to give the mother one (a possibility Freud later allows for in

'Femininity' [Freud 1964: XXII, 112–35]]? Why is the daughter's resentment and bitterness surmised to be directed toward the mother as competitor for the father's affections and not toward the father as interloper into the mother–daughter relation? Why, in short, is the daughter's 'rivalry' assumed to be with the mother and not with the father?

(Fuss 1995: 63)

Why, indeed, does Freud favour one set of identifications over another? In this case history, no simple answer is forthcoming. Instead, it has been left to later analysts to reinterpret the materials Freud presents to us. 'A Case of Homosexuality in a Woman', like all of Freud's renowned cases, has attracted painstaking readings by critics such as Fuss who are adept at using Freudian concepts to question, redirect, even undermine Freud's own conclusions. So even if Freud's writings on sexuality may at times fail to acknowledge the full implications of their discoveries, they nonetheless remain an immensely fruitful resource for comprehending the intricate, if at times baffling, psychic processes that create masculine and feminine, heterosexual and homosexual, desires and identifications.

LACAN'S ORDERS

Towards the end of Freud's career, a young French psychiatrist began publishing papers that would eventually have a huge impact on how twentieth-century intellectuals contemplated subjectivity and sexuality. The work of Jacques Lacan, which came to prominence with the publication of his *Écrits* in France (1966), has for decades been notorious for its persistent inaccessibility. Faithful to Freud's exploration of the ego, the unconscious, and sexual desire, Lacan built up a distinctive theoretical framework that remains contentious to this day. Frequently decried for its inscrutability, Lacan's abstruse and elliptical style draws attention to the very material from which in his view the human subject must emerge: language itself. For Lacan's aim is to reveal how complex tensions within signification comprise the field where the subject must battle for its identity. Determined to

eliminate any remaining traces of biological thought from Freud's enterprise, Lacan is decidedly anti-humanist in revealing how the 'I' is besieged, not by impulses and instincts, but signs and meanings. Identity, in Lacan's world, always remains precarious, and that is because the subject seeks to consolidate itself through processes of *mis*recognition. This structure forms the basis of Lacan's succeeding analyses of (1) how the subject emerges within the linguistic order, and (2) how the subject must take up a sexual position in relation to the primary signifier: the phallus. This part of the present chapter explores these concepts in turn.

Lacan introduces the fragile status of the 'I' in a brief but dense conference paper first delivered in Zürich in 1949, which returns to one of the concepts he presented to the same audience some thirteen years before. In 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the *I* as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience', Lacan reports that his theory of the 'mirror stage' has been widely accepted by the French Freudians. Denoted in French as the '*stade du miroir*', this 'stage' has a double meaning. At one and the same time, it signifies a phase of development and a type of spectacle. Moreover, when placed next to '*miroir*', this 'stage' concerns both the *specular* and the *spectacular*. The very term condenses the complex features of this fundamental psychoanalytic concept. Bearing this double 'stage' in mind, the *stade du miroir* accounts for a formative experience that young children undergo between the ages of six and eighteen months. At that point, when placed in front of a mirror, the child will be able to recognize its own image. But rather than claim the child simply sees its own reflection, Lacan insists that this episode places the primordial 'I' in a 'fictional direction'. Why? This is how Lacan explains the 'fictional' quality to this *stade*:

For the total form of the body, by which the subject anticipates the maturation of his power in a mirage, is given to him only as a gestalt, that is, in an exteriority in which, to be sure, this form is more constitutive than constituted, but in which, above all, it appears to him as the contour of his stature that freezes it and in a symmetry that reverses it, in opposition to the turbulent movement with which the subject feels he animates it. Through these two aspects of its

appearance, this gestalt – whose power [*prégnance*] should be considered linked to the species, though its motor style is as yet unrecognizable – symbolizes the *I*'s mental permanence, at the same time as it prefigures its alienating destination. This gestalt is also replete with the correspondences that unite the *I* with the statue onto which man projects himself, the phantoms that dominate him, and the automaton with which the world of his own making tends to achieve function in an ambiguous relation.

(Lacan 2007: 76–77).

This is a demanding paragraph to understand. But once we untangle its line of reasoning, we can see how the young child hardly finds *itself* in the mirror. For the gestalt (or figure) that appears on the silvered surface is what grants the 'I' its identity. That is why the gestalt is 'more constitutive than constituted'. In reflecting the young child, the gestalt offers an illusion. To begin with, it appears large and stands motionless, like a statue. This reflection resembles an automaton. So it is not surprising that Lacan regards this image as the 'alienating destination' of the 'I'. When the child discovers its 'I' in the mirror, that 'I' happens to be nothing more than a projection. On this model, the reflection is far from real. Instead, it is like a hallucination. But for the child to operate in the world, it requires a projected 'I' that will at least provide an image of coherence. Such an image permits the 'I' to come together from fragmentary parts, to gain some stability, no matter how imaginary, in its development.

Yet stability is not easily attained. From this moment on, the young child enters a structure of anticipation, since it projects the 'I' it believes itself to be. Given that the mirror stage inaugurates a temporal dimension, the 'I' enters history. Propelled into the historical process, the 'I' labours under an obligation to harden itself against the world, creating the belief that its completeness and wholeness is guaranteed by what is only a mere image set before it. '[T]he mirror stage', writes Lacan, 'is a drama whose internal pressure pushes precipitously from insufficiency to anticipation – and, for the subject caught up in the lure of spatial identification, turns out fantasies that proceed from a fragmented form of the body to what I will call an "orthopedic" form of its

tonality'. Eventually, the 'I' adopts the 'donned armor of an alienating identity that will mark his entire mental development with its rigid structure' (Lacan 2007: 78). The 'I' must defend itself well because its 'fictional direction' means it can never coincide with itself. In other words, the 'I' will always remain in an asymptotic relation to the subject. So in no respect can the 'I' be seen as self-sufficient. For the 'I' only comes into being in the field of the other: the statue-like gestalt that the young child necessarily *mis*recognizes as itself.

Yet Lacan's theory of the 'I' does not rest at the mirror stage. Later, in papers delivered during the 1950s, he turns to linguistics to explain how his theory of the 'I' remodels the prevailing tradition of thought descending from René Descartes (1596–1650) that asserts '*cogito ergo sum*' ('I think, therefore I am'). The Cartesian paradigm, writes Lacan, wrongly assumes a 'link between the transparency of the transcendental subject and his existential affirmation' (Lacan 2007: 429). What, then, can shake the Cartesian conviction that the 'I' is transparently present to itself? One needs to look at how language splits the subject, fracturing the certainty that the 'I' that thinks remains the 'I' that is. Lacan sums up this particular question when he declares: 'The point is not to know whether I speak of myself in a way that conforms to what I am, but rather to know whether, when I speak of myself, I am the same as the self of whom I speak' (Lacan 2007: 430). There are, then, two separate aspects to the 'I' that situates the subject.

To comprehend the non-coincidence of the 'I' that is and the 'I' that speaks, Lacan forces attention on Freud's foundational work of psychoanalytic inquiry, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900). By devising techniques to unravel his patients' recollection of dreams, Freud discovered how the unconscious operated by its own organizational principles. These are principles that arrange meanings in a fashion that is initially incomprehensible to the conscious mind. In coming to terms with the peculiar structure of the unconscious, Freud detected two predominant tendencies: towards condensation, on the one hand, and towards displacement, on the other. Later, theorists working in the field of linguistics would elaborate how condensation equates with

metaphor, and displacement with metonymy – although both metaphor and metonymy, like many rhetorical figures, have a tendency to flow into and merge with one another. Lacan takes the concept much further, by enumerating a great many of the tropes – or rhetorical figures – that fall under condensation and displacement:

Ellipsis and pleonasm, hyperbaton or syllepsis, repression, repetition, apposition – these are the syntactical displacements; metaphor, cat-achresis, antonomasia, allegory, metonymy, and synecdoche – these are the semantic condensations; Freud teaches us to read in them the intentions – whether ostentatious or demonstrative, dissimulating or persuasive, retaliatory or seductive – with which the subject modulates his oneiric discourse.

(Lacan 2007: 221–22)

To Lacan, therefore, the unconscious that emerges from ‘oneiric discourse’ (the discourse of dreaming) is structured like a language. That is to say, the unconscious has its own combinatory powers, its own syntactical and semantic operations, piecing together bits of meaning in ways that may at first appear strange and unfamiliar, but which become lucid to a practised psychoanalytic eye. Lacan believes subjectivity depends on the separation between the peculiar field of meaning-production that inhabits the unconscious and the operation of language in the conscious mind. But that is not to claim that there is a neat division between these two fields of meaning.

Lacan extends his interest to the modes of signification structuring the field in which consciousness must operate, not just the revelations about repressive processes disclosed by dreams. Rather than assume that the subject has autonomous control over its expression as an ‘I’, Lacan insists that language subordinates the subject to its own orders: ‘The form in which language expresses itself in and of itself defines subjectivity. Language says: “You will go here, and when you see this, you will turn off there”’ (Lacan 2007: 246). Instead of asserting self-sufficiency, the ‘I’ within language can only know itself in terms of the other that recognizes the ‘I’. Adopting a stance familiar to any reader of *The*

Phenomenology of Spirit (1975 [1807]) by the philosopher G.W.F. Hegel (1770–1831), Lacan sketches the predicament of the 'I' in these terms:

What I seek in speech is the response of the other. What constitutes me as a subject is my question. In order to be recognized by the other, I proffer what was only in view of what will be. In order to find him, I call him by a name that he must assume or refuse in order to answer me.

I identify myself in language, but only by losing myself in it as an object. What is realized in my history is not the past definite of what was, since it is no more, or even the perfect of what has been in what I am, but the future anterior as what I shall have been, given what I am in the process of becoming.

(Lacan 2007: 247)

These playful sentences, which accentuate Lacan's own linguistic self-consciousness, draw attention to the ways in which the tense of the 'I' is always in a process of deferred *becoming*. In other words, the 'I' can only know of itself in terms of the other who shall offer a response. But the response of the other cannot be known in advance, thus placing the 'I' in a state of anticipation, if not agonized suspension. For the subject remains, as he suggestively remarks, in the condition of the 'future anterior': a projective tense that looks in expectation to both the past and the future, to what one *will have been* and to what one is *going to become*. It is, as Samuel Weber remarks, a structure of '*anticipated belatedness*' (Weber 1991: 9). Oscillating between anticipation and belatedness, Lacan's subject is by definition a subject of desire, constantly launching itself into the field of other where it seeks to know what it might have become.

To explain how the subject is positioned within these fields of signification, Lacan turns to the work of the early twentieth-century Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913), whose posthumously published *Course in General Linguistics* (1915) brought together lectures delivered between 1906 and 1911. Saussure asserted that the linguistic sign could be divided into two components: the signifier (the materiality of the sign) and the

signified (the meaning of the sign). The relation between these two elements, Saussure insists, is arbitrary. Not only that, the signifier cannot define the signified alone. For the production of meaning depends on more and more signifiers that proliferate along a chain. One signifier has to come to the aid of another signifier, in an unending process. They are, to cite Lacan's simile, like 'links by which a necklace firmly hooks onto a link of another necklace made of links' (Lacan 2007: 502). This image concisely represents the chain of signifiers as both a closed system and an infinite system, one in which the phonemes or units of sound are limited in number and yet whose combination remains innumerable.

Since the 'I' anticipates its own becoming within the signifying chain, and since it correspondingly seeks its meaning within the field of the other, Lacan devised three orders that explain the forces in which the subject finds itself caught. Just as Freud invented the terms id, ego and superego to comprehend how the 'I' negotiated its place in the world, so too did Lacan construct his own tripartite scheme: the Symbolic, the Imaginary and the Real. Using his own distinctive terminology, Lacan's three topoi bear a loose resemblance to Freud's already well-established categories.

In Lacanian theory, the Imaginary defines the realm of identificatory misrecognitions inaugurated at the mirror stage when the subject seeks to cohere its self-image. Throughout his later work, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (1978 [1973]), Lacan repeatedly comments on the role played in the Imaginary by the *objet petit a*: an untranslatable term which captures the idea that the subject must project a little object into the field of the other (*autre*), so that it can recognize itself. In many respects, the *objet petit a* stands for the subject's ambiguous relation to its specularized gestalt. In order to maintain its identity, the subject must undergo the hallucinatory effort to pull its mirrored image together out of disparate parts. In the field of the Imaginary, the *objet petit a* marks the inevitable gap that the subject must constantly seal over in the process of recognizing its mirrored Gestalt. That is to say, the *objet petit a* arises from the contradictory moment when the subject situates itself in what remains an alienating specular realm. 'Through the function of the *objet a*', writes Lacan, 'the subject separates himself off, ceases to be linked to the

vacillation of being, in the sense that it forms the essence of alienation' (Lacan 1978: 258).

Desperately seeking to find a place within the Imaginary, the subject is forever under siege from Lacan's second order, the Symbolic. Fluctuating, disjointed, heterogeneous, the Symbolic outdoes and overreaches the subject's desires to find a stable point for its identity in the Imaginary. The Symbolic is shared by all subjects, providing the realm of signification where everyone has access to the pronoun 'I'. In his elegant introduction to Lacan's work, Malcolm Bowie characterizes this distinctly social and intersubjective field of signification in a particularly memorable way: 'It is a *res publica* that does not allow any one of its members to be himself, keep himself or recreate in his own image the things that lie beyond him' (Bowie 1991: 93).

The Real, by comparison, is harder to construe. It defines the zone that falls outside the domain of signification. It is where psychic materials remain unsymbolized, through processes such as trauma. In psychosis, for example, the subject collapses into the Real. So the Real, a profoundly threatening order, encompasses both the Imaginary and the Symbolic, and it puts immense pressure on both to keep their intersubjective processes at work. In many ways, one can view the Imaginary and Symbolic as fields that tensely rise up against each other, creating friction between opposing agencies that compete for meaning, forever fending off the field of non-meaning marked by the Real.

How, then, might Lacan's reflections on the split subject, the field of signification, and the domains of the Imaginary, Symbolic and Real throw light on sexuality? To answer this question, more attention must be paid to Lacan's theory of desire. We have already noted that the Lacanian subject, one which is always caught within a signifiatory process, is a subject of desire. Moreover, this subject is compelled to desire because it is by definition a subject of lack. For this subject has to enter the field of the other to discover what it may become. Lacan phrases 'that which structures desire' in the following way:

Desire is what manifests itself in the interval demand excavates just shy of itself, insofar as the subject, articulating the signifying chain,

brings to light his lack of being [*manque à être*] with his call to receive the complement of this lack from the Other – assuming that the Other, the locus of speech, is also the locus of this lack.

What it is thus the Other's job to provide – and, indeed, it is what he does not have, since he too lacks being – is what is called love, but it is also hate and ignorance.

(Lacan 2007: 524)

These sentences reveal that there is no neat reciprocity between the giving and receiving of love. Why? The answer is because there is a necessary disequilibrium between demand and need. On the one hand, the infant experiences need – for nourishment. On the other hand, the infant makes a demand – for love. But the two are not necessarily congruent. Opposing the subject's wishes, the other, after all, may well have its own perceptions about what constitutes need. Lacan remarks, for example, that the infant may feel overfed by the breast, the 'choking pap' that comes from the other. Such a situation results in a confusion between the satisfaction of need and the gift of love. That is why Lacan writes that 'desire is neither the appetite for satisfaction, nor the demand for love, but the difference that results from the subtraction of the first from the second, the phenomenon of their splitting (*Spaltung*)' (Lacan 2007: 580). Once again, therefore, we return to the idea that the desiring subject is split, this time because of the subtraction of need from demand, resulting in desire.

This *Spaltung* refers to the term on which Freud concentrates in one of his unfinished posthumous papers, 'Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defence' (published in 1940). There Freud explains what happens when the child's 'ego is under the sway of a powerful instinctual demand which it is accustomed to satisfy' yet finds itself 'suddenly frightened by an experience which teaches it that the continuance of this satisfaction will result in an almost intolerable real danger' (Freud 1964: XXIII, 275). To Freud, the resulting *Spaltung* means that the ego must: (1) refuse the threat of prohibition; and (2) manage the fear in the form of a pathological symptom. In Lacanian terms, by comparison, this event marks the moment that structures desire, where need can never be met in terms of demand.

But this model still fails to account for how desire becomes focused on certain objects – what Freud calls sexual object-choices. In the process of having needs, making demands, and therefore becoming a desiring subject, the child will doubtless confront the crux that fascinates Freud: how the subject faces up to the anatomical distinction between the sexes. To explain how the subject becomes sexed, Lacan employs what is perhaps his most controversial theoretical device: the phallus. Dating from 1958, ‘The Signification of the Phallus’ emphasizes that the phallus ‘is the signifier that is destined to designate meaning effects as a whole, insofar as the signifier conditions them by its presence as a signifier’ (Lacan 2007: 579). If these words sound like a riddle, then his succeeding explanation looks even more perplexing:

The phallus is the privileged signifier of that mark in which the role [part] of Logos is wedded to the advent of desire.

One could say that this signifier is chosen as the most salient of what can be grasped in sexual intercourse [copulation] as real, as well as the most symbolic, in the literal (typographical) sense of the term, since it is equivalent in intercourse to the (logical) copula. One could also say that, by virtue of its turgidity, it is the image of the vital flow as it is transmitted in generation.

All of these remarks merely veil the fact that it can play its role only when veiled, that is, as itself a sign of the latency with which any signifiable is struck, when it is raised (*aufgehoben* [in the Hegelian sense]) to the function of the signifier.

(Lacan 2007: 581)

This densely argued passage stakes several significant claims upon the phallus. First of all, the phallus enjoys the inviolable position of God’s own word (the Logos) in structuring the order of signification. Like Freud’s anatomical penis, the phallus has a vivid role to play in how subjects negotiate both the castration and Oedipus complexes. But, given Lacan’s aversion to biological systems of thinking, his phallus presents itself as a purely textual element – as the most crucial piece of signifiatory material within the chain of meaning. It has, for Lacan, rich connotations. Since the penis may be used for copulation, so the phallus

may be seen as a linguistic copula: the verbal unit (enshrined in the verb 'to be') that yokes disparate elements together, securing the chain of shifting meanings. In all its mysterious primacy, the phallus remains forever veiled within signification. Since the phallus is always masked, it serves as a constant lure for desire. 'It is', writes Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, 'the signifier that we seek through all other signifiers, all other objects' (Borch-Jacobsen 1991: 211). Through this ongoing search for the all-important but elusive signifier, sexuality emerges.

In the subject's desiring search for the phallus, two basic positions may be taken up. Returning to terms first used in Freud's *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921), Lacan draws on the distinction between *being* and *having*. 'It is easy', writes Freud about the boy's Oedipus complex, 'to state in a formula the distinction between an identification with the father and the choice of the father as an object. In the first case one's father is what one would like to be, and in the second he is what one would like to have' (Freud 1955: XVIII, 106). Lacan appropriates this model to show how the phallus structures the relations between the sexes. The movement between being the phallus for an other, and having the phallus for oneself creates the dialectic of desire. The Lacanian subject has to discover, like Freud's boy and girl, that the mother does not have the phallus. Likewise, this subject may well seek to be the phallus when returning the mother's desire. Sexual identifications, therefore, are arranged around this primary signifier. Elsewhere, Lacan styles its significatory power in slightly different terms. He remarks that this signifier represents the 'father, the Name-of-the-father' which 'sustains the structure of desire with the structure of the law' (Lacan 1978: 34). Like an omnipotent phantom or all-presiding deity, the phallic symbol of paternal authority retains its pre-eminence by hiding within the structures it governs.

What, then, are the implications of the veiled phallus for the two sexes? What are the consequences for either *being* or *having* the primary signifier whose hidden position creates the lure of desire? Lacan stresses that the anatomical distinction between the sexes provides the cultural form through which subjects come to recognize their position on either the male or female side of

sexual difference. Repeatedly, Lacan's exegetes stress that, for him, anatomy is not destiny. Instead, the imagined presence or absence of the penis provides the acknowledged framework in which subjects seek – but necessarily fail – to adopt a settled position on either side of the sexual divide. That is why Lacan insists that any attempt either to *be* or to *have* the phallus rests on an imposture. Given that the Lacanian subject desires precisely because of lack, it can never remain complete in the sexually differentiated position it strives to take up. Even if the male side may provide the illusion that masculinity *has* the phallus, it only does so by covering over the male subject's constitutive lack. Conversely, if the female side may suggest that femininity can *be* the phallus, it does so only in the form of a 'masquerade'. Considering how women are under pressure to make themselves into desirable objects, Lacan argues that, in the process, femininity has to reject 'an essential part' of itself: 'It is for what she is not that she expects to be desired as well as loved' (Lacan 2007: 583).

But in Lacan's later writings, femininity is not always subjected to the 'masquerade' demanded by the reigning phallus. To show that femininity might elude phallic law, he returned in the mid-1970s to aspects of the vexed debate on femininity that absorbed Freud's attention some fifty years before, and which has remained a source of critical interest to modern feminist theory. In the essays by Lacan and his students brought together in *Feminine Sexuality: Jacques Lacan and the école freudienne* (Mitchell and Rose 1982), there are several statements that indicate how the phallus might not have complete dominance over all aspects of sexual difference. This collection features one of the most thought-provoking seminars on female sexuality that Lacan published in *Encore* (1975). In 'God and the Jouissance of ~~The~~ Woman' – renowned for both its density of reference and its linguistic provocations – Lacan returns our attention to the notorious difficulties into which Freud ran when attempting to settle the 'riddle' of femininity. So fraught has this longstanding controversy been that 'petty considerations', claims Lacan, 'have caused havoc' (Mitchell and Rose 1982: 145). In this seminar, Lacan aims to explain how and why the phallus erects itself on a fantasy of woman, or – more vividly – 'The Woman'. To expose how 'The

Woman' is a myth, Lacan deletes the definite article in both the title and text of his seminar. Instead of 'The Woman', he explores the *jouissance* of 'the woman', a phenomenon that confounds, defies and exceeds the phallic order. Such *jouissance* – a word which remains extremely hard to paraphrase in English – captures the exhilarating bliss and intensity of sexual experience.

In the brief preface to her translation of this seminar, Jacqueline Rose remarks that here Lacan 'underline[s] the problem which has dominated the psychoanalytic debate on feminine sexuality to date: how to hold on to Freud's most radical insight that sexual difference is a symbolic construct; how to retrieve femininity from a total subordination to the effects of that construct' (Mitchell and Rose 1982: 137–38). To tackle this issue, Lacan declares that, since he was twenty, he has been a student of Western love, and his researches into its history have revealed the significance of female mystics, such as Hadewijch d'Anvers (fl. early thirteenth century) and Saint Theresa of Avila (1515–82). Commenting on the well-known Roman sculpture 'Saint Theresa in Ecstasy' (c. 1665) by Giovanni Lorenzo Bernini (1598–1680), Lacan asks: 'what is her *jouissance*, her [sexual] coming from?' 'It is clear', he adds, 'that the essential testimony of the mystics is that they are experiencing it but know nothing about it' (Mitchell and Rose 1982: 147). Rather than assert that such ecstasy is about 'fucking', Lacan claims this experience is '*something more*': 'that which puts us on the path of ex-istence'. Such 'ex-istence' is literally the *ex stasis* encrypted in 'ecstasy': an intensely pleasurable out-of-body state that cannot, as these puns vividly dramatize, be contained. Indeed, such feminine *jouissance* cannot be captured by the 'God' in his title. What, then, does this 'God' signify? In his highly attentive reading of this seminar, Bowie remarks that it refers to two structures. The first is "the One" that male sexuality ordains, and that psychoanalysis, in temporary partnership with Christian theology, is able to unmask in an indefinite variety of human contexts'. The second is 'the Other': the 'impediment ... that comes between partners in the well-known [loving] arrangement', an arrangement Lacan reminds us we are 'not strictly entitled to call "a sexual relationship"' (Bowie 1991: 154). And why cannot we speak of 'a sexual relationship'? Because a third

party – the other's Other, so to speak – always interrupts the subject's desire. That is to say, a subject never obtains complete reciprocity from its beloved other, since both parties are displaced, if not torn apart, by the chain of signifiers where all desires circulate. Saint Theresa's mystical experience, therefore, represents a *jouissance* that evades 'the One' and 'the Other', both of them 'Gods'.

Yet in her defiance of such omniscient authority, Saint Theresa's apparent orgasmic 'ex-istence' certainly gives one pause. What really is at stake in removing 'The Woman' by putting the 'the woman' under typographical erasure? Is it really the case that *jouissance* marks the only moment in which femininity subverts phallic authority? Although Lacan wants us to see how Saint Theresa's autoeroticism confounds the phallic signifier, we might be tempted to conclude that his appeal to this female mystic represents yet another mystification of femininity – femininity as mystification perhaps. Is Lacan's critique necessarily distinct from widespread stereotypes that appeal to the eternal mystery of femininity? Here, I think, we come up against a notable instance of how psychoanalytic theory may be reinscribing the sexual myths it ostensibly strives to overturn. Understandably, this type of double bind has prompted many searching feminist investigations into the sexist assumptions upon which psychoanalysis would appear to be based.

FEMINIST INTERVENTIONS

It scarcely needs stating that psychoanalysis has, since its inception, been the subject of highly contentious debate. Even though psychoanalytic methods have gained ascendancy in some disciplines such as film studies, many areas of academic research remain firmly unpersuaded by its claims, and it is worth briefly summarizing some general objections. Critics hostile to the critical work of Freud and Lacan frequently raise the following (often related) points:

- (1) psychoanalysis fails to address the historical specificity of the structures and narratives it explores, by seeking to pass off its findings as timeless and universal;

- (2) psychoanalysis conspires with the phallic authority it strives to analyse, by refusing to propose models that could or would remove the penis or phallus from its omnipotent place;
- (3) psychoanalysis is preposterously based on an epistemological impossibility, by professing to interpret what it cannot by definition understand, since the unconscious is not immediately accessible to knowledge;
- (4) psychoanalysis lays far too much emphasis on the conservative nature of sexual identifications, by presuming that eroticism can only be understood by returning it to foundational events that occurred extremely early in childhood, and which supposedly determine all succeeding relations; and
- (5) psychoanalysis purports, but does not manage, to resist biological assumptions, by reducing its critique of sexuality to questions of anatomy.

These are only some of the remonstrations made against psychoanalysis, both as a clinical practice and a field of academic research.

If one area of inquiry has explored these criticisms in strenuous detail, it is assuredly feminist theory. That is why the final section of this chapter summarizes the divided positions feminists have adopted in relation to psychoanalysis. It is important to note that late twentieth-century feminist engagements with Freud reactivated a much earlier discussion involving many different women analysts who extensively critiqued his work in the late 1920s, particularly in relation to his studies of femininity. In 'Female Sexuality', Freud engages with the writings of a number of psychoanalysts, including Helene Deutsch (1884–1982), Karen Horney (1885–1952) and Melanie Klein (1882–1960), who varied in their viewpoints on how the girl acquires femininity. Deutsch generally supported Freud's positions, while Horney contended that his theory of penis-envy was mistaken, emphasizing instead how men were both envious and fearful of the woman's capacity to reproduce. Klein, by comparison, drew increasing attention to the crises children undergo in the pre-Oedipal phase; her work explores how the infant projects parts of its emerging ego on to the mother's body, a topic pursued by

later psychoanalysts, such as Julia Kristeva. Even if Freud's women contemporaries were not uniformly sympathetic to feminism, their powerful interventions made it clear that his models of female sexuality could be revised along several different lines of psychic identification. In addition, it is worth observing that no matter how masculinist one might think Freud and Lacan, women therapists and theorists have maintained a prominent place in the development of psychoanalytic thought. (On the latter point, see Sayers 1991.)

In the English-speaking world, the vigorous feminist discussion of Freud's writings emerged once again in the late 1960s, when the renewal of campaigns for women's rights during that decade initially looked most unfavourably on his theory of penis-envy. In the 1970s, however, the controversy changed direction with the gradual appearance of books and essays that claimed Freud's writing could be interpreted in a critically advantageous way for feminism. By the 1980s, Lacan's difficult and demanding texts were widely circulating in English, and these too prompted significant questions for feminists seeking theoretical tools that would illuminate the psychic and social formation of femininity within a patriarchal culture. In Britain, the journal *m/f* became one of the most significant forums for considering how and why psychoanalysis might be used to feminist ends. Published between 1978 and 1986, this periodical brought together some of the most pioneering work in this field, and many of its notable contributions are collected in a volume titled *The Woman in Question* (Adams and Cowie 1990). Subsequent feminist research in this vein unfolded rapidly, as *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary* (Wright 1992) comprehensively reveals.

Simply to sketch the main areas of contention between feminism and psychoanalysis, let me begin with Kate Millett's notorious polemic against penis-envy in *Sexual Politics* (1970), before examining some rather different feminist approaches to Freud and Lacan. A landmark study for its time, Millett's *Sexual Politics* provides an immensely ambitious analysis of patriarchal culture in both the Victorian and modern periods. On the whole, Millett's discussion focuses on male literary figures, such as D.H. Lawrence

(1885–1930) and Henry Miller (1891–1980), in a series of chapters examining the development of sexist thinking from the Victorian epoch to the sexual revolution of the 1960s. Freud's work features in Millett's central chapter, 'The Counterrevolution, 1930–60'. To Millett, these three counterrevolutionary decades mark an era that quelled the advanced sexual views pioneered in writings by Henrik Ibsen (1828–1906), George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950) and Oscar Wilde, all of whom came to prominence during the *fin de siècle*. In her protests against the 'habitual masculine bias of Freud's own terms and diction', Millett rebuts Freud's castration complex on the basis that he makes no distinction between 'fact' and 'fantasy' (Millett 1970: 182–83). 'It is interesting', she notes parenthetically, 'that Freud should imagine the young female's fears centre about castration rather than rape – a phenomenon which girls are in fact, and with reason, in dread of, since it happens to them and castration does not' (Millett 1970:184). But even if this observation points to a prejudice in Freud's choice of terms, it remains hard to see how he ever passed off the castration complex in girls as 'fact' rather than 'fantasy'. Millett contends that Freud's theories collapse culture into nature, the social into the biological – and with devastating consequences:

Freud had spurned an excellent opportunity to open the door to hundreds of enlightening studies on the effect of male-supremacist culture on the ego development of the young female, preferring instead to sanctify her oppression in terms of the inevitable law of 'biology'. The theory of penis envy has so effectively obfuscated understanding that all psychology has done since has not yet unravelled this matter of social causation. If, as seems unlikely, penis envy can mean anything at all, it is productive only within the total cultural context of sex. And here it would seem that girls are fully cognizant of male supremacy long before they see their brother's penis. ... Confronted with so much concrete evidence of the male's superior status, sensing on all sides the depreciation in which they are held, girls envy not the penis, but only what the penis gives one social pretensions to.

(Millett 1970: 187)

For several years, Millett's rhetorically assured polemic exerted influence over some sections of the Women's Liberation Movement. But, as later writers would stress, the very arguments Millett angles at Freud's exploration of penis-envy are to a degree answered by Freud himself. One possibility that Millett flatly refuses to entertain is that Freud regards the castration complex as a moment which symbolizes precisely the sexual antagonism at work within 'the total context'. Perhaps if Millett reflected for a moment, penis-envy might appear as a consequence, rather than a cause, of what it means to find one's place on either side of the sexual divide.

Following the empowering rise of the Women's Liberation Movement, the study that most sharply contested Millett's claims was Juliet Mitchell's *Psychoanalysis and Feminism: Freud, Reich, Laing and Women* (1974), an imposing volume of considerable scope and foresight whose impact on feminist theory cannot be overestimated. On the very first page, Mitchell declares: 'psychoanalysis is not a recommendation for a patriarchal society, but an analysis of one' (Mitchell 1974: xiii). It is with this principle in mind that Mitchell rounds on the work of several feminist contemporaries, notably Betty Friedan (1921–2006), Shulamith Firestone, Eva Figes and – most incisively – Millett herself. By criticizing the 'realist' empiricism of *Sexual Politics*, Mitchell shows how Millett wrongly assumes that the female infant remains a psychologically rational subject that envies the penis in a wholly knowing manner. 'Desire, phantasy, the laws of the unconscious or even unconsciousness', remarks Mitchell, 'are absent from [Millett's] social realism' (Mitchell 1970: 354). Repeatedly, Mitchell insists that Freud's inquiries are definitely not rooted in biological thought – a point, it is worth noting, disputed by a later monumental study, *Freud, Biologist of the Mind: Beyond the Psychoanalytic Legend* by Frank J. Sulloway (1983 [1980]), and one scrutinized by Jean Laplanche, a writer faithful to Freud's project (Laplanche 1989). 'To Freud', writes Mitchell, 'society demands of the psychological bisexuality of both sexes that one sex attain a preponderance of femininity, the other of masculinity: man and woman are made in culture' (Mitchell 1974: 131).

Yet, despite the force of such criticism, Mitchell's own study would in turn become the subject of further feminist critique. In a book whose title echoes Mitchell's, *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: The Daughter's Seduction* (1982), Jane Gallop finds the conclusion to Mitchell's work just as 'realist' in its assumptions as those of feminist writers, such as Millett, whose arguments Mitchell does not hesitate to castigate in precisely those terms. In her final chapter Mitchell makes a rallying-cry to overthrow the patriarchal order, as if a 'realist' approach to this matter would achieve this end. Here is how Mitchell stakes her claim on the sexual revolution that must come:

Under patriarchal order women are oppressed in their very psychologies of femininity; once this order is retained only in a highly contradictory manner this oppression manifests itself. Women have to organize themselves as a group to effect a change in the basic ideology of human society. To be effective, this can be no righteous challenge to the simple domination of men (though this plays a tactical part), but a struggle based on a theory of the social nonnecessity at this stage of development of the laws instituted by patriarchy.

(Mitchell 1974: 414)

The trouble with this position, as Gallop sees it, is that it removes exactly the emphasis that Mitchell elsewhere puts on the significance of desire, fantasy and the unconscious that a 'realist' such as Millett has been criticized for counting out of her analysis. Little wonder Gallop is led to scrutinize the logic of Mitchell's claim: 'If women "can organize themselves as a group to effect a change in the basic ideology of human society" and "can insist on the birth" of "new structures" in the unconscious, then somehow they transcend the non-contingent fact that human beings, subject to the unconscious, are fated not to be rational' (Gallop 1982: 13). Gallop's comment drives at the centre of one of the most enduring conflicts in feminist engagements with psychoanalysis. To what extent does psychoanalysis provide feminism with a model of social, if not psychic, change? Do its findings suggest that women are inevitably 'fated' by certain determinations? Or does this body of theory demand a 'rational' analysis that helps us to

understand more clearly the arbitrary process of how we become sexed subjects? What restrictions does psychoanalysis force upon concepts of sex and gender? And what freedoms from social and sexual hierarchies does it enable us to imagine?

It is instructive to see how this conflict of interests emerges in two significant essays published by the British journal *Feminist Review* in the early 1980s. In 'Psychoanalysis: Psychic Law and Order?' (1981), Elizabeth Wilson reflects on some of Freud's best-known passages that explain the castration and Oedipus complexes. Wilson finds that Freud inconsistently veers between nature and culture, between what is biologically determined and what is socially constructed – a point that should become quickly apparent to anyone reading his work for the first time. 'Sometimes', claims Wilson, 'he seems to be addressing the problem of the psychological consequences of biology and how the psyche of the individual is built on a biological base; at others he seems rather to use biological analogies and metaphors' (Wilson 1981: 67). Wilson points to a similar contradiction in Mitchell's analysis. On this view, although Mitchell suppresses the 'biological' side of Freud, privileging that aspect which shows how 'man and woman are made in culture', at times her positive reading of Freud risks duplicating his biases. For example, after she has discussed Freud's analysis of the girl's Oedipus complex in 'Femininity', Mitchell concludes: 'The woman's task is to *reproduce* society, the man's to go on and *produce* new developments. There is an obvious link between the security of Oedipal father-love and the happy hearth and home of later years' (Mitchell 1974: 118). From Wilson's perspective, this is a lamentable conviction to hold because it indicates that 'the sexual division of labour as we know it in an industrial capitalist society has some permanent correspondence with the creation of "masculinity" and "femininity"' (Wilson 1981: 69). Wilson contends that, even if psychoanalysis offers a theory of how women have been psychically subordinated under patriarchy, such theoretical speculations remain a political distraction. So she insists that campaigns to 'change the conditions of work – in the world and in the home – might do more for our psyches as well as for our pockets than an endless contemplation of how we came to be chained' (Wilson 1981: 76).

Jacqueline Rose's 'Femininity and Its Discontents' (1983) is in part a studied reply to Wilson's essay. More generally, however, Rose's discussion provides a painstaking account of why psychoanalysis retains such a contentious position in feminist theory. Rose confronts the belief held by many left-wing intellectuals, such as Wilson, that psychoanalytic thought does not provide an adequate model of social change. She observes how the work of Freud and Lacan has been regularly accused of 'functionalism', the consequences of which she spells out as follows:

[Psychoanalysis] is accepted as a theory of how women are psychically 'induced' into femininity by a patriarchal culture, and is then accused of perpetuating that process, either though a practice assumed to be *prescriptive* about women's role (that is what women *should* do), or because the very effectiveness of the account as a *description* (that is what is demanded of women, what they are *expected* to do) leaves no possibility of change.

(Rose 1983: 8)

There is no doubt that many feminists have claimed that psychoanalysis simply offers yet another bleak account for women's inevitable socialization in a male-dominated society. Confronting attacks on psychoanalytic 'functionalism', Rose argues that there is much to be learned from the way Freud's work reveals how femininity is 'induced' by the patriarchal order. In her view, there are distinct limitations to criticizing Freud and Lacan for producing a theory that supposedly shows how women are psychically conditioned into femininity. If, Rose claims, one censures Freud and Lacan for producing theories that steadfastly uphold the Name-of-the-Father, then '[p]sychoanalysis is drawn in the direction of a general theory of culture or a sociological account of gender because these seem to lay greater emphasis on the pressures of the "outside" world'. But, as she adds, 'it is this very pulling away from the psychoanalytic stress on the "internal" complexity and difficulty of psychic life which produces the functionalism which is then criticized' (Rose 1983: 10). That is to say, feminist opponents of psychoanalysis misguidedly assume that sexual inequality can more fruitfully be tackled by appealing

purely to the external world. It is precisely that assumption, Rose suggests, which comes at an extremely high theoretical cost to feminism. She firmly believes feminist politics has much to gain from understanding how psychoanalysis 'allows into the political arena problems of subjectivity (subjectivity as a problem) which tend to be suppressed from other forms of political debate'. So, by drawing attention to the vexed question of subjectivity, psychoanalysis 'may also help us to open the space between different notions of political identity – between the idea of a political identity for feminism (what women require) and that of a feminine identity for women (what women are or should be)' (Rose 1983: 19).

In making these remarks, Rose is largely challenging the traditional Marxist insensitivity to 'subjectivity as a problem'. In the past, Marxist thought often believed that concentrating on subjective needs led to a narrow individualism: a preoccupation that revolutionaries regard as extremely hazardous when attention should be paid instead to collective struggles for political change. Rose's point is that, once we consider the conflicted condition of our gendered subjectivities, it might become possible to comprehend why there may well be fraught divisions within the very collectivities that seek to work together in the name of emancipation. In the light of Rose's comments, it could be fairly claimed that the feminist engagement with psychoanalytic thought has made a significant contribution to the larger debate about 'difference' that preoccupied many feminist theorists in the 1980s. By focusing on 'difference', feminists were increasingly questioning, not only how one thought about the difference between women and men, but also how one considered the many differences – including those of age, class, ethnicity and sexuality – that at times came between women seeking liberation from patriarchal oppression.

Rose's influential essay stresses that feminist explorations of psychic processes need not defend Freud and Lacan to the letter. It is indeed the case that Freud's and Lacan's respective works have provided feminism with the opportunity to revise psychoanalytic models that explain how subjectivity develops. The theorist who has become most notable for modifying the

phallogocentric paradigms of psychoanalysis to feminist ends is Julia Kristeva. From the outset of her career, Kristeva has been preoccupied with the processes that bring the subject into the domain of language. Trained as a linguist and semiotician, Kristeva's earliest research redefined the Lacanian distinction between the Imaginary and the Symbolic. She elaborates three orders – the semiotic, the thetic and the symbolic – to explain the intricate stages through which the subject comes to represent itself to itself. Since her research concentrates on the channelling of the drives, Kristeva consequently has much to say about sexuality.

Kristeva details her three orders in *Revolution in Poetic Language*, first published in France in 1974. There she explains how the semiotic refers to its Greek etymology, where the word means 'distinctive mark, trace, index, precursory sign, proof, engraved or written sign, imprint, trace, figuration' (Kristeva 1984: 25). Since the word implies '*distinctiveness*', it helps to identify 'a precise modality in the signifying process': that is, the process that sustains the subject. Like Freud and Lacan, Kristeva wants to define how the infant's multiple drives are manipulated and directed by its encounters with both its body and its environment:

Discrete quantities of energy move through the body of the subject who is not yet constituted as such and, in the course of his development, they are arranged according to the various constraints imposed on this body – always already in the semiotic process – by family and social structures. In this way the drives, which are 'energy' charges as well as 'psychical' marks, articulate what we call a *chora*: a non-expressive totality formed by the drives and their stases in a motility that is as full of movement as it is regulated.

(Kristeva 1984: 25)

Adapted from the cosmology detailed in Plato's *Timaeus*, the *chora* denotes 'an essentially mobile and extremely provisional articulation constituted by movement and their ephemeral stases'. Not yet related to the signifying chain, the *chora* is a pre-symbolic realm that provides the dual rhythms of freedom and constraint from which a relation to signification will gradually emerge. The

chora represents the pre-linguistic moment where the child remains unable to differentiate itself from the maternal body. But, unlike Freud and Lacan, Kristeva remarks that this stage involves, not random polymorphous perversity, but a space in which perceptions and sensations are taking on some semblance of organization.

Following the semiotic is the rupture marked by the *thetic*: ‘a break in the signifying process, establishing the *identification* of the subject and its object as preconditions of propositionality’ (Kristeva 1984: 43). ‘All enunciation’, Kristeva adds, ‘is *thetic*’. So the creation of a word or sentence is based on ‘propositionality’: that is, a proposing of meaning. Placed on the ‘threshold of language’, the *thetic* is where symbolization can begin. The *thetic* stage combines both the Lacanian mirror stage and Freud’s established model of castration. It marks the moment when subjectivity necessarily emerges through imaginary misrecognition and through a relation to the primary but veiled signifier: the phallus.

The third and final order is called the symbolic, and it bears some resemblance to the field of signification to which Lacan gave the same name. Here is how Kristeva outlines how and why the symbolic eventually must intervene: ‘Dependence on the mother is severed, and transformed into a symbolic relation to an other; the constitution of the Other is indispensable for communicating with an other’. Entry into the symbolic marks ‘the first social censorship’ because the subject, as it propels its image of itself into the world, meets with symbolic castration (Kristeva 1984: 48). But for Kristeva the subject never quite deserts the semiotic. Certain types of avant-garde literary writing – especially by French *Symbolistes*, such as Stéphane Mallarmé (1842–98), as well as Irish modernists like James Joyce (1882–1941) – reveal “‘distortions” of the signifying chain’. Such works, argues Kristeva, disclose ‘those drives that the *thetic* phase was not able to sublimate [*relever, aufgehoben* – the concept is a Hegelian one] by linking them into signifier and signified’ (Kristeva 1984: 49). From this perspective, art enacts the ‘semiotization of the symbolic’, and in doing so ‘represents the flow of *jouissance* into language’ (Kristeva 1984: 79).

Kristeva's later work, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982), makes it clear that her concern with the semiotic *chora* means that sexual desire refers as much to the maternal body as it does to the phallic signifier that constitutes the subject's lack. What she calls the 'object' marks 'our earliest attempts to release the hold of the *maternal* entity even before ex-isting outside of her'. This 'object-ing', argues Kristeva, constitutes a 'violent, clumsy breaking away' that carries the 'risk of falling back under the sway of a power as securing as it is stifling' (Kristeva 1982: 13). To be sure, this focus on the significance of the '*maternal* entity' to the inchoate human subject provides a counterweight to the phallocentrism of Freud's and Lacan's paradigms. Yet it is worth bearing in mind that, in examining how the sign 'represses the *chora* and its eternal return', Kristeva may well be in danger of rewriting an antiquated sexist myth herself (Kristeva 1982: 14). For Kristeva, in associating the maternal body with pre-Oedipality, suggests that the feminine remains to some degree passive, if not primitive. After all, even if the semiotic is always ready to rise up against symbolic constraints, it plays a muted, intermittent and contained role beneath the inevitable governance of the phallus.

The avant-garde writings of French philosopher and psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray provide a striking contrast to Kristeva's modification of psychoanalytic orthodoxies. In Irigaray's exuberant work, she refutes the unquestionable phallic dominance of Freudian theory so that an alternative feminine economy arises in its stead. On the opening page of *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985a [1974]), Irigaray quotes the infamous passage where Freud declares femininity is a 'riddle'. 'Through history', remarks Freud in 'Femininity', 'people have knocked their heads against the riddle of the nature of femininity'. Pursuing its Sphinx-like status, he adds: 'Nor will *you* have escaped worrying over this problem – those of you who are men; to those of you who are women this will not apply – you are yourselves the problem' (Freud 1964: XXII, 113). Responding to Freud's apparent condescension, Irigaray exclaims: 'So it would be a case of you men speaking among yourselves about woman, who cannot be involved in hearing or producing a discourse about the

riddle ... she represents for you' (Irigaray 1985a: 13). Interlarding many quotations from Freud's writings on sexuality into her vigorously questioning prose, Irigaray seeks to expose how his "differentiation" into two sexes derives from the *a priori* assumption that the little girl is, must become a man minus certain attributes whose paradigm is morphological – attributes capable of determining, of assuring, the reproduction-specularization of the same' (Irigaray 1985a: 27). From her perspective, the Freudian model reproduces sexual difference through reflection (or specularization), thus creating a self-monumentalizing and repetitive structure of *sameness*.

But Irigaray's relentless and thorough criticism of Freud's work does not result in a wholehearted rejection of psychic models for comprehending female sexuality. Much of Irigaray's polemic examines the psychic and somatic dimensions to women's desires that Freud's work tellingly excludes or suppresses. Noting how Freud insists that 'woman devotes ... very little cathexis to autoeroticism, auto-representation, auto-reproduction, even in homosexuality', Irigaray celebrates instead 'the pleasure of caresses, words, representations of representations that remind woman of her sex, her sex organs, her sexes' (Irigaray 1985a: 103). It is precisely towards the realm of autoeroticism and homosexuality that Irigaray turns, so that a domain of pleasures can be sustained without being subordinated to the Freudian penis or the Lacanian phallus. In 'This Sex Which Is Not One', Irigaray finds delightful eroticism in exactly the somatic zone in which Freud detects such castratory lack: the female genitals. By declaring that 'woman's autoeroticism is very different from man's' because he 'needs an instrument: his hand', she insists that 'woman ... touches herself in and of herself without any need for mediation, and before there is any way to distinguish activity from passivity'. Why? Because 'her genitals are formed by two lips in continuous contact'. So, Irigaray continues, 'she is already two – but not divisible into one (s) – that caress each other' (Irigaray 1985b: 24). Free from the phallomorphic logic of the 'same', unfettered by the dictates of another party, woman emerges not as 'one' sex, nor does she belong to a neatly sequential logic where $1 + 1 = 2$. Defying both unitary and binary calculations, Irigaray's vision of woman

claims femininity is at once multiple yet inseparable, plural yet autonomous.

Such assertions have proved highly debatable among feminist readers. Diana Fuss explores how and why feminist critics have often taken Irigaray to task for promoting an essentialist vision of the female body, one that reduces femininity, in much the same way as Freud had done, to a matter of anatomy. Even when construed as a metaphor, Irigaray's celebration of the 'two lips' may well appear to imply that women only speak through their bodies, not their minds. Yet, as Fuss argues, it is possible to produce a sympathetic reading that reveals how Irigaray's 'language of essence' remains 'a politically strategic gesture of displacement'. Why should this be? Because Irigaray's work exposes exactly how, in the Western philosophical tradition descending from Aristotle, 'woman' has remained an enduring 'site of contradiction': 'on the one hand, woman is asserted to have an essence which defines her as woman [designated through qualities such as weakness, passivity, receptivity and emotion] and yet, on the other hand, woman is relegated to the status of matter and can have no access to essence (the most she can do is to facilitate man's actualizing of his inner potential)' (Fuss 1989: 72). On this basis, Irigaray may be thought to undo women's essential lack, so to speak, through a tactical discourse that mimes only to subvert the contradictory location that the feminine has occupied in Western metaphysics.

Hélène Cixous's 'Sorties' (1986 [1975]) bears comparison with Irigaray's work, since it, too, focuses on the masculinist logic of the 'same': a rigid system of reasoning that Cixous memorably names 'the Empire of the Selfsame'. In Cixous's view, the masculinist imperialism of the 'Selfsame' violently enacts an ongoing 'story of phallogentrism'. This is a phallic narrative that 'keeps the movement toward the other staged in a patriarchal production, under Man's law' (Cixous 1986: 79). Faced with the aggrandizements of the triumphal 'Selfsame', Cixous longs to liberate women's *jouissance*. Such feminine *jouissance*, she claims, belongs to an 'instinctual economy' that 'cannot be identified by a man or referred to the masculine economy' (Cixous 1986: 82). Similar to Kristeva's *chora*, Cixous's feminine economy of desire asserts that woman 'has never ceased to hear what-comes-before-language

reverberating' (Cixous 1986: 88). But although one may feel carried away by the poetic vitality of Cixous's prose, here too we might wonder if this suppressed feminine *jouissance* really poses an alternative to the binary logic of gender upheld by the phallogocratic patriarchy. In this respect, the sexual logic celebrated by her *écriture féminine* – or feminine writing practice – may be somewhat more traditional than it appears. 'Let masculine sexuality', declares Cixous, 'gravitate around the penis, engendering this centralized body ... under the party dictatorship'. 'Woman', she argues, 'does not perform on herself this regionalization that profits the couple head-sex', and she adds this eloquent sentence whose breathless phrasing dramatizes her concept of feminine sexuality:

Her libido is cosmic, just as her unconscious is worldwide: her writing can also go on and on, without ever inscribing or distinguishing contours, daring these dizzying passages in other, fleeting, and passionate dwellings within him, within the hims and hers whom she inhabits just long enough to watch them, as close as possible to the unconscious from the moment they arise; to love them, as close as possible to instinctual drives, and then, further, all filled with these brief identifying hugs and kisses, she goes on and on infinitely.

(Cixous 1986: 88)

Against the fierce limits set by masculine desire, claims Cixous, feminine *jouissance* remains unbounded: it reaches into the unconscious of both sexes because it represents the traces of all the bodily pleasures that have been repressed from the moment the infant must submit to the symbolic phallus. But, once again, it is worth asking if Cixous's model of feminine sexuality does not reduce women to precisely those qualities that have long been stigmatized in a patriarchal order. Consigned to the unconscious, to instinct, to the body, even to irrationality, this feminine libidinal economy bears an uncanny resemblance to familiar stereotypes of women. Then again, such writing surely solicits an affirmative interpretation as well. Cixous's *écriture féminine* clearly demands to be understood as a strategic writing practice, one that seizes on exactly the terms used by the patriarchy to demean

women and subversively transform them into celebratory qualities of feminist strength.

Taken together, the works of Kristeva, Irigaray and Cixous dramatize some of the contradictions that emerge when feminists seek to free women's desires from the structures erected by psychoanalytic phallicism. What is more, their writing forces attention on how sexuality can only be comprehended once we examine the economic principles which inform differing masculine and feminine desires. Their work forms part of a wide-ranging series of theoretical debates about the hoarding, circulation and expenditure of sexual energies and flows. Throughout the twentieth century, many theorists have grappled with the view that sexuality brings together life-giving and death-dealing forces, often in extremely violent unions. The next chapter considers why sexuality has repeatedly been viewed in a volatile life-and-death struggle that will lead to either emancipation or destruction.

3

LIBIDINAL ECONOMIES

(DE)GENERATING PLEASURES

To show how sexuality has often been thought to exist in a life-and-death struggle, let me begin this chapter with a familiar literary example. Anyone acquainted with *Songs and Sonnets* by the English Renaissance poet John Donne (1572–1631) is more than likely to recall his provocative play on the word ‘die’. Collected posthumously in 1633, his erotically charged poem ‘The Canonization’ is arguably his most memorable work that exploits this verb to show how death haunts sexual desire. In the third and fourth stanzas, the male speaker boldly challenges his implicitly hostile listeners to recognize the depth of his passion. Once he finishes reproving them by making it plain that his love shall cause injury to no one, he promptly conjures a striking image that vivifies this intense emotion. ‘Call her one, me another flye’, he proclaims, ‘We’re Tapers too, and at our owne cost die’ (Donne 1985: 58). In this deft conceit, the lovers figure as both the lit taper and the hapless fly that rushes madly into its flame. Such is the burning power of the libido that both lovers must ‘die’ – in several senses of the word.

For the verb to 'die', in this context, draws on sexual slang to indicate that these lovers shall reach orgasm. What is more, this punning death occurs at a considerable 'cost' because, according to the Renaissance mind, it ultimately shortens one's life. So in enjoying sex, the lovers not only 'die' as they climax, they also bring actual death closer through this pleasurable practice. In other words, they experience the 'little death' whose transitoriness paradoxically lets love thrive. Thus Donne's persona declares: 'Wee can dye by it, if not live by love'. Little wonder 'The Canonization' views this contradiction like the 'Phoenix riddle'. Just as the mythical bird takes flight from its ashes, so too must love 'prove / Mysterious'.

Donne's poetry, of course, predates the modern discourse of sexuality by more than three centuries. But the mystery he identifies through his unforgettable sexual pun has never ceased to obsess Western accounts of sexual desire. Rarely, however, have modern inquiries into the sexual struggles between life and death displayed the teasing wit of Donne's poetry. For the evident 'cost' of this libidinal economy has been a frequent preoccupation among modern theorists precisely because it involves, not only the 'little death', but also – most troublingly – the erotic impulse to take life. To be sure, many literary and film genres have gone to great lengths in manipulating this potentially terrifying idea, all the way from the libertine narratives of the Marquis de Sade (1740–1814) to contemporary horror and 'slasher' movies. If one style of modern writing has insistently detailed the potency of deathly desire, then it is surely the Gothic (see Botting 1995). So pervasive has this belief in the deathliness of sex become throughout many areas of modern cultural production that some critics have gone so far as to insist that certain desires, especially male ones, are in themselves murderous. In this respect, one of the most turbulent debates in recent decades focuses on how pornographic representation either leads to sexual crimes or liberates suppressed eroticism. The large markets for films and magazines that feature scenes of abuse, humiliation, even simulated death emblemize a widespread interest in sexual violence. Such materials, which are mainly but not exclusively aimed at male consumers, constantly provoke debates about their precise

role in psychic fantasy and in homicidal reality. So what is it that has induced Western culture to believe that sexuality wages an ongoing battle between life and death? Is desire aroused by death-dealing impulses or is it driven by intense forces that emancipate body and mind?

To answer these and related questions, the first part of the present chapter investigates why many theorists concur that sexuality remains caught within what might be called a conflicted system of (de)generating pleasures. Beginning with the economic principles governing Freud's influential model of the death drive, I proceed to subsequent critical works that struggle to define the volatile energies comprising the libido. The psychic and somatic antagonism between productive and unproductive, life-giving and death-driven energies certainly materializes in the realm of pornography, a hugely profitable commodity that encourages us to reflect carefully on the political and moral connections between libidinal and economic principles. In the second part of this chapter, I consider why pornography, more than any other erotic product, has been such a focus of concern for the contending harms and joys of sexuality. Since feminist commentators have explored this field of inquiry in much greater detail than anyone else, my discussion concentrates principally on their work.

Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) certainly sets the agenda for many subsequent theoretical studies that examine the antagonistic drives that mobilize sexual desire. This study counts as one of his greatest speculative inquiries into the ways in which male and female subjects psychically manage the libido. Here, for the first time, Freud draws attention to what his translators initially called the 'death instinct', and which later commentators would more frequently term the death drive. (On the debate concerning the appropriate use of 'instinct' and 'drive' when discussing Freudian theory, see pp. 59–62) In this absorbing meditative account of psychic conflict, Freud declares that his psychoanalytic inquiry will pursue the 'economic' factor that regulates the subject's experiences of pleasure and unpleasure. It is the latter quality, he remarks, that interests him most. He wants to discover exactly which mechanisms come into play so that the subject avoids pleasure. At this stage of his research, one of these mechanisms is

plain to see, since '[u]nder the influence of the ego's instincts of self-preservation, the pleasure principle is replaced by the *reality principle*' (Freud 1955: XVIII, 10). That is to say, the ego – which always strives, as best it can, for homeostasis – must at times face up to realities that threaten the subject's immediate demands for pleasure. The pleasure principle, Freud adds, appears to be closely associated with the 'sexual instincts, which are so hard to "educate"'. Consequently, the pleasure principle 'often succeeds in overcoming the reality principle, to the detriment of the organism as a whole'. So he feels confident in asserting that this is a wholly explicable tension between two psychic operations, one demanding pleasure, the other allowing unpleasure to arise in the face of prohibitive reality.

Yet, having established this point, Freud is left with a vexed issue to resolve. By his own admission, the tension he has identified is certainly not the only psychic operation that permits the release of unpleasure. Something else, he suspects, is at work within the psyche, and he wants to know what it is. In a highly self-reflective manner, Freud observes how his researches have shown that 'individual instincts or parts of instincts turn out to be incompatible with their aims or demands with the remaining ones, which are able to combine into the inclusive unity of the ego' (Freud 1955: XVIII, 11). These 'incompatible' instincts, he claims, are split off from the ego through repression and thus severed from pleasurable satisfaction. But repressed elements, as Freud frequently notes, often return 'by roundabout paths', resulting in an experience that the ego can only recognize as unpleasure. For the moment, he cannot comprehend how these 'incompatible' instincts or drives undergo such transformation from pleasure to unpleasure. Puzzled by this phenomenon, he devotes the rest of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* to finding an explanation for it.

By drawing on many observations from contemporary experiments in zoology, Freud concludes that at a certain point of development all organisms experience a compulsion to repeat. He observes that, although adults quickly lose interest in reading a novel for a second time, children often adore having stories told to them again and again. It may well be the case, he suggests,

that adulthood should free one from such obsessive, if not regressive, childish desires. But Freud's point is that repetition-compulsion, under specific stressful conditions, can still erupt in adult life. Early in this study, he remarks how countless cases of shell-shock after the First World War (1914–18) bring into stark relief the nature of traumatic neurosis, revealing how the subject under severe pressure cannot help repeating frightening episodes. Such cases prompt him to think that there might be an aspect to the instincts or drives that has little or no relation to the pleasure principle. Focusing on repetition-compulsion, he entertains the idea that '*an instinct is an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things*' (Freud 1955: XVIII, 36). He openly acknowledges that this observation appears rather strange, since until this point psychoanalysis has always assumed that the instincts or drives follow paths of change and development. What, then, should Freud make of what he calls 'the *conservative* nature of living substance'? What is it that impels the organism to return to the 'quiescence of the inorganic world' (Freud 1955: XVIII, 62)?

As he reflects on this matter, Freud advances the view that the organism's instincts or drives would seem to travel in two directions at once. Pulled between change and development, on the one hand, and conserving an 'earlier state', on the other hand, the subject's psychic energies move with a 'vacillating rhythm'. 'One group of instincts', writes Freud, 'rushes forward so as to reach the final aim of life as quickly as possible; but when a particular stage in the advance has been reached, the other group jerks back to a certain point to make a fresh start and so prolong the journey' (Freud 1955: XVIII, 41). That is to say, the instincts or drives that lead to reproduction ('the final aim of life') are challenged by ones that insist on returning to an earlier phase ('to make a fresh start'). Contemplating this double movement, Freud realizes that the very project of life is necessarily burdened by the prospect of death. To Freud, these two competing forces converge most powerfully in heterosexual copulation:

We have all experienced how the greatest pleasure attainable by us, that of the sexual act, is associated with a momentary extinction of a

highly intensified excitation. The binding of an instinctual impulse would be a preliminary function designed to prepare the excitation for its final elimination in the pleasure of discharge.

(Freud 1955: XVIII, 62)

These sentences unravel the enigma he has been pursuing all along. Instead of releasing the life instincts, the exquisitely pleasurable moment of orgasm (which may lead to reproduction) involves extinction. The perpetuation of life, therefore, rests upon a momentary death – the ‘little death’, no less.

Three years later, in *The Ego and the Id*, Freud once again remarked that the ‘discharge of the sexual substances’ derives from the way the psyche deals with ‘libidinal tensions’ (Freud 1961: XIX, 47). Here, however, he considers this question in relation to the fraught relationship between the two opposing psychic agencies he calls the ego and the id. Since the ego always demands constancy, he argues that its function is to desexualize the libidinal energies rising up from the unconscious depths of the id. At the same time, he observes, the ego’s impulse towards constant self-preservation actually endangers it. Since the ego demands not to be disturbed by sexual tensions, its homeostatic imperative means that it is forever losing energy. The ego remains, in Freud’s words, on ‘a continuous descent towards death’. To combat this potentially entropic state, the id must keep fighting back. Orgasm, he argues, is the only act that can bring together the desexualizing descent towards death and the libidinal excitation for life. Hence we can grasp ‘the likeness of the condition that follows complete sexual satisfaction to dying, and ... the fact that death coincides with the act of copulation in some of the lower animals’ (Freud 1961: XIX, 47). In their ecstatic convergence, therefore, both sets of instincts resolve the widely acknowledged paradox of how death inhabits sex. But succeeding investigations by later theorists would cast doubt on the seemingly magical resolution of Eros (life instincts) and Thanatos (death instincts) in the orgasmic moment reached in heterosexual copulation.

Some three decades afterwards, French cultural theorist, novelist and sometime surrealist Georges Bataille produced his own

distinctive model to comprehend the battle fought between prohibitive reality and the inflammatory death drive. In *Eroticism* (1962 [1957]), he examines how and why 'tenderness has no effect on the interaction between eroticism and death'. To uphold this claim, Bataille situates the disruptive nature of the death drive in systems of economic circulation. In his view, sexuality involves disorderly and anti-rationalistic experiences that are by turns excessive, wasteful, ruinous, even murderous. Although he does not follow Freud in theorizing the psychological organization of the instincts or drives, Bataille readily writes of 'contagious impulses' that impel eroticism on its (de)generating path (Bataille 1962: 41). He states that sexuality must discharge its deathly energy at all costs:

Erotic conduct is the opposite of normal conduct as spending is the opposite of getting. If we follow the dictates of reason we try to acquire all kinds of goods, we work in order to increase the sum of our possessions or of our knowledge, we use all means to get richer and to possess more. Our status in the social order is based on this sort of behaviour. But when the fever of sex seizes us we behave in the opposite way. We recklessly draw on our strength and sometimes in the violence of passion we squander considerable resources to no real purpose. Pleasure is so close to ruinous waste that we refer to the moment of climax as a 'little death'. Consequently anything that suggests erotic excess always implies disorder.

(Bataille 1962: 170)

So great can this 'rising tide of excess' become that Bataille observes how '[b]rutality and murder are further steps in the same direction'. The most intense pleasures, he claims, arise from this ruinous squandering of resources, as they expend themselves in symbolic death. The remainder of *Eroticism* sets out to prove why this should be the case.

Early in his book, Bataille declares that 'eroticism is assenting to life even in death' (Bataille 1962: 11). Eroticism comprises a series of short overlapping studies that throw into relief Bataille's main conviction that symbolic death paradoxically guarantees the continuation of life. In his view, the sexual act dramatizes a

deathly moment when human subjects experience what is denied elsewhere in their lives: a loss of self. The problem for humanity, he claims, is that we are all '*discontinuous* beings' (Bataille 1962: 12). Since we are '*discontinuous*' individuals, Bataille asserts that there remain inescapable gulfs between each and every one of us. In other words, '[i]f you die, it is not my death'. Inevitably isolated, individuals can only eradicate the fundamental divides between the self and the other by entering into vertiginous experiences whose breathtaking dizziness provides exactly the continuity demanded by death. Bataille largely derives this dialectic between continuity and discontinuity from the Enlightenment philosopher G.W.F. Hegel, who explores the distinction between identity and difference throughout the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807). Unlike Hegel, however, Bataille is very much a twentieth-century thinker in locating this dialectic of desire, not just in the divide between the self and other, but in the erotic mechanisms that generate the tension between the two. Just as Freud believed that heterosexual copulation brought together contending psychic energies of life and death, so too does Bataille draw parallels with biological reproduction to disclose how these rivalrous forces converge. Bataille remarks that, although the '[s]perm and ovum are to begin with discontinuous entities', they may well '*unite*', enabling 'a new entity' to come 'into existence' from 'the death and disappearance of the separate beings' (Bataille 1962: 14). On this basis, he examines types of physical, emotional and ritualized eroticism which provide 'a feeling of profound continuity' in a world where each human being otherwise remains agonisingly alone (Bataille 1962: 15).

Bataille brings the systematic antagonisms between desire and death most clearly into focus by exploring two related structures common to prehistoric, classical and modern cultures: first, the significance of taboos and transgression; and second, the intimate friction between the sacred and the profane. Bearing in mind the anthropological researches of Marcel Mauss (1872–1950), Bataille remarks that taboos ostensibly serve to eliminate violence from society. In many civilizations, he observes, there are systematic taboos on murder, rape, incest and adultery. But such taboos can only function successfully when individuals recognize that these

prohibitions demand to be transgressed. Solely by being broken can the taboo remain in place. Although Bataille is not especially interested in elaborating a model of Freudian repression, his view of culture partly follows the theoretical contours of Freud's turbulent id by insisting that 'man's natural impulses to violence' must eventually rebel against the restrictions laid down by custom (Bataille 1962: 69). Time and again, he insists that taboos intensify erotic rebellion, since they solicit precisely the symbolic death they outlaw. Not only that, in his view taboos often signify that sexual pleasure is dirty, shameful, sinful and unclean. Such is Bataille's faith in this dynamic that he makes the following polemical statement: 'Many women cannot reach their climax without pretending to themselves that they are being raped' (Bataille 1962: 107). Consumed by transgressive violence, therefore, eroticism ultimately involves a symbolic death that secures the life of the taboo.

In order to accentuate the contradictory movement between taboo and transgression, Bataille frequently forces attention on how this structure is clearly evident in the ways past civilizations organized the sacred and the profane. He claims that ritual sacrifice enables us to see how cultures elevate acts that are at all other times outlawed. Bataille observes that, in ritually sacrificing animals or people, a culture killed what it managed to hoard, and thus made a gift from that acquired surplus. In effect, this type of sacrifice brought 'life and death into harmony', giving 'death the upsurge of life', and 'life the momentousness and the vertigo of death opening on to the unknown' (Bataille 1962: 91). Modern culture, however, finds it hard to grasp this dynamic. Why? The answer, as he sees it, lies in Christian ritual. Christianity, he contends, has made it expressly difficult for modern Western culture to comprehend how and why eroticism is closely connected with rites of transgression, since this anti-pagan religion elevates sacrifice to a wholly symbolic plane. 'However obsessive we find the symbol of the Cross', he writes, 'the [Christian] mass is not readily identified with the bloody sacrifice' (Bataille 1962: 89). Rarely, if ever, do practising Christians admit that the celebration of the Eucharist bears the traces of earlier pagan feasts involving ceremonial cannibalism and the shedding of blood.

Bataille notes that the Crucifixion, which stands at the focus of the Christian mass, can itself be viewed as the violation of a taboo that seeks to harmonize the sacred and the profane. Yet Christianity does its utmost to dissociate its interpretation of the Crucifixion from pagan traditions. Although Christian liturgy describes the murder of the Saviour as '*felix culpa*' (the 'happy fault'), it strips away the erotic investment in the sacrificial breaking of the taboo. The Christian treatment of sacrifice thus points to two related issues: (1) how the Christian mass absorbs and neutralizes the pagan practices it wholeheartedly condemns; and (2) how Christian teaching severs the link between eroticism and divinity. So, if Christianity symbolically brings the sacred and the profane together, then it does so only by sundering religion and desire from each other. Piety alone, not eroticism, is what leads the Christian towards the continuity promised by the infinite. Not surprisingly, Bataille believes this emphasis on piety has particularly damaging consequences for the way modern culture perceives the tormented relations between sexuality and death.

According to Bataille, the Christian attitude has convinced us that the lost continuity for which we yearn lies only in the immortal afterlife promised to those who are pious. But Christian piety, as Bataille observes, simply could not manage to embrace all desires for continuity. Although it undertook the rigorous repression of unclean practices deriving from pagan times, Christianity failed to purify all aspects of humanity. Given its excessiveness, libidinal energy could not be accommodated by the Christian emphasis on symbolic transgression alone. As a result, this form of institutionalized religion 'deepened the degree of sensual disturbance by forbidding organized transgression' (Bataille 1962: 127). Put another way, the more Christianity sought to purge the world of sin, the greater pressure there was on the deathly power of sexual desire to transgress. In sum, Bataille believes Christianity bears the burden of responsibility for why sexuality has been associated with shame, filth and even hatred.

Under these appalling conditions, Bataille argues, it is no surprise that women become the most reviled and thus eroticized objects of desire. Although in making such claims Bataille often

appears to be replicating the prejudices of a patriarchal culture, he notes that it 'would be quite wrong to say that women are more beautiful or even more desirable than men' (Bataille 1962: 131). This comment indicates that Bataille is aware of how cultures construct arbitrary values of beauty and ugliness. At the same time, however, his sensitivity to the contingency of cultural values never leads him to focus on what the male eroticization of female beauty might imply for women's own desires. In this respect, the masculinist bias of his discussion becomes evident when he examines 'low prostitution' (rather than the work performed by the well-paid courtesan) (Bataille 1962: 134). In turning to the indecency, degradation and sordidness associated with 'low' prostitutes, Bataille asserts that it is exactly these qualities that provide men with the pathway that leads to deathly continuity. He observes that the female sex worker serves a paradoxical function: she is the '*erotic object*' that 'implies the abolition of the limits of all objects' (Bataille 1962: 130). On this view, male heterosexuality requires a female sexual object, not to fuse with a woman, but to fuse with death. In the process, the female sexual object is negated. From the man's perspective, therefore, the 'low' prostitute becomes the symbolic embodiment of death.

By now it should be clear that Bataille's largely anthropological account of desire operates within a system of accumulation and expenditure, where life and death are opposing forces structured around a system of taboos and transgressions. Even though Bataille only minimally acknowledges the Freudian concern with the economic return of repressed psychic energies, his writing in large part shares the strong interest psychoanalysis has in the withholding and unleashing of sexual forces. Chapter 2 has already explained in some detail how psychoanalytic theory, through the work of Lacan, pursues the idea that desire arises from a sense of lack that yearns for completion, only to discover that such longing can never be fulfilled. But the libidinal economies structured by each model have struck a number of subsequent theorists to be entirely wrongheaded. Several later writers contest the belief that sexuality is built upon either deficiencies that require energetic compensation or cultural prohibitions that must be ritually violated. Several works appearing in France throughout the 1970s

seriously question Freud's, Lacan's and Bataille's respective propositions. Each study in turn seeks to create alternative frameworks for considering the economic principles animating sexual desire.

Perhaps the most polemical challenge to earlier theories that posited desire in relation to lack emerges in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1984 [1972]). In this book, the co-authors express their infuriation at the Freudian death-drive, which is theorized in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Laplanche and Pontalis summarize this drive as that which represents the 'fundamental tendency of every living being to return to the inorganic state' (Laplanche and Pontalis 1973: 97). Deleuze and Guattari declare that it is a principle that supports the oppressive myth of Oedipus central to psychoanalysis. The Freudian death drive, they claim, exists within a closed circuit that entraps the subject. 'If Freud needs death as a principle', they write, 'this is by virtue of the requirements of the dualism that maintains the qualitative opposition between the drives (you will not escape the conflict)' (Deleuze and Guattari 1984: 332). They continually insist that Freud's theorization of the Oedipus complex remains complicit with the capitalist structures that demand the maintenance of the nuclear family. Rather than provide an account of how to emancipate sexual desires, in their view psychoanalysis submits eroticism to punishing cultural laws: 'instead of participating in an undertaking that will bring about genuine liberation, psychoanalysis is taking part in the work of bourgeois repression at its most far-reaching level, that is to say, keeping European humanity harnessed to the yoke of daddy-mommy and *making no effort to do away with this problem once and for all*' (Deleuze and Guattari 1984: 50). They believe that Freudian and Lacanian thought, in proclaiming that the child must pass through the Oedipal conflict to become a fully operative subject, refuses to explore possible desires that might bring about the downfall of the imprisoning Oedipal triad of 'daddy, mommy, and me' (Deleuze and Guattari 1984: 101). The Oedipal drama, they write, is an indisputable form of 'blackmail': 'either you recognize the Oedipal character of infantile sexuality, or you abandon all positions of sexuality' (Deleuze and Guattari

1984: 100). How, then, do Deleuze and Guattari propose to obviate the incarcerating designs of Oedipus?

The project of *Anti-Oedipus* is to turn completely upside-down all theoretical models that claim that desire is predicated on lack. Close to the start of their defiant analysis, they make the sweeping declaration that '[t]he traditional logic of desire is all wrong from the outset' (Deleuze and Guattari 1984: 25). From the moment the West engaged with the 'Platonic logic of desire', so they say, a decidedly mistaken choice was made between '*production*' and '*acquisition*'. Ever since Plato committed this grave error, it seems, desire has been erroneously placed on the side of acquisition, misguidedly forcing us to think that it is lack that spurs desire. Although they concede that an alternative perspective can be found in the writings of Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), Deleuze and Guattari insist that almost all theoretical positions to date assume that desire means 'the lack of a real object'. By reading this strand of Western thought against the grain, they set out to demonstrate that desire is an explicitly productive principle. Even on the level of psychic fantasy, they maintain, desire appears to be immensely capable of producing objects to satisfy wishfulfilments. Pursuing this point, Deleuze and Guattari contend that, since desire manages to produce so many objects for itself, it can hardly be understood as lacking anything at all. As they see it, the problem with psychoanalysis lies in the fallacious view that there is a given subject from which desire must proceed as lack. To their minds, desire produces innumerable objects for itself precisely because it has no subject. 'Desire does not lack anything', they observe, 'it does not lack its object. It is, rather, the *subject* that is missing in desire, or desire that lacks a fixed subject' (Deleuze and Guattari 1984: 26). *Anti-Oedipus* urges us to acknowledge that the illusion of a fixed subject only comes into being through the repressive law enshrined in Oedipus. If, they argue, one does away with Oedipus, one can at last see how desire is fundamentally *productive*, rather than lacking. Moreover, they state that desire produces *real objects*, not phantasmatic ones (i.e. object produces through the psychical function of fantasy). Throughout its sprawling discussion, *Anti-Oedipus* remains true to its theory by generating a voluminous

amount of often repetitious text to explain how and why desire attaches to all relations of social production. In this way, Deleuze and Guattari seek to bind the material world and the libido into one and the same form.

In order to capture the explicitly productive power of desire, Deleuze and Guattari argue that we need to detach libidinal energies from the subject and think instead of 'desiring-machines', an anti-humanist metaphor that strategically prevents them from fastening their idea to a traditional notion of the bounded organic body. Recognized as an unstoppable flow (whose source they never question), desire remains for Deleuze and Guattari in perpetual movement, following diverse channels, proliferating and multiplying, fragmenting and reconfiguring, forever adopting unforeseen shapes and forms. 'Desire', they declare, 'constantly couples continuous flows and partial objects that are by nature fragmentary and fragmented' (Deleuze and Guattari 1984: 5). Missing a subject rather than an object, desire impersonally connects one erotic machine with another, continually devising innovative circuits through which it can whirl. On one page after another, Deleuze and Guattari figure this process as a matter of 'plugging in'. Like the cables and sockets that carry electricity, desire for them moves in too many pleasurable networks to be contained by either Freud's myth of Oedipus or Bataille's sacrificial breaking of taboos: 'The satisfaction the handyman experiences when he plugs something into an electric socket or diverts a stream of water can scarcely be explained in terms of "playing mommy and daddy", or by the pleasure of violating a taboo' (Deleuze and Guattari 1984: 7). In their view, 'plugging in' permits desire to flow in unanticipated ways. Yet the concept of 'plugging in' may well appear to subvert their concern with the manifold operations of desire. Even if Deleuze and Guattari are frequently provocative in their use of metaphor, the connection they want to illustrate through plugs and sockets surely discloses more than a residual phallicism in their thought. Such 'plugging in', however, is not a ceaseless process. They argue that desire does not move entirely without interruption. The further we travel into *Anti-Oedipus* the clearer it becomes that there is a force countering the desiring-machine's intensely productive energies.

They name the force that resists the compulsive stamina of desiring-machines the 'body without organs'. This is an organless 'body' that can take many different manifestations, in variably full or empty, intense or exhausted forms. In explaining what they mean by this paradoxical term, Deleuze and Guattari describe the body without organs as distinctly non-productive. In repudiating Lacanian accounts of the body as 'an original nothingness' that comes into its own only as an imaginary 'projection', they insist that the body without organs exists 'without an image' (Deleuze and Guattari 1984: 8). They contend that the body without organs repulses the desiring-machines, since it aims at stasis, rather than flow. Unlike a human subject, the organless body refers to any phenomenon that arrests or impedes desire. Their cardinal example is capitalism. 'Capital', they claim, 'is indeed the body without organs of the capitalist, or rather of the capitalist being' (Deleuze and Guattari 1984: 10). In other words, capital appropriates the productive power of desire on to its surface, and it is so successful in absorbing these energies that it miraculously presents itself as the origin of production. In commandeering desire to its own arrogant ends, capital suggests that it, and not the desire that fuels the energy of labour, is the only productive power. Psychoanalysis, they believe, does much the same. Just as capital takes over and hardens the desirous flows of human toil, so too does the human subject in Freud's Oedipal scheme become resistant to the multiple movements of libidinal energy. 'The full body without organs', they write, 'is produced as antiproduction, that is to say it intervenes within the process as such for the sole purpose of rejecting any attempt to impose on it any sort of [Oedipal] triangulation implying that it was produced by its parents' (Deleuze and Guattari 1984: 15). Since the Oedipus complex involves rejecting desires for one's parents, Deleuze and Guattari assert that the Freudian subject creates the terrible delusion that it has freed itself at last from the machines that keep the circuits of desire in motion. Even though they concede that Freud's myth of Oedipus at least has the virtue of glimpsing the many psychic conflicts that energize the desiring-machines, Deleuze and Guattari imply that his theory is ultimately another body without organs, since it impedes and resists the anarchic

libidinal movements of desire evident everywhere in the world. In fact, for them there is one figure in particular that makes the limitations to Oedipus abundantly clear. The figure in question is the schizophrenic.

Since it emerged in many ways from the anti-psychiatry movement of the 1960s, Deleuze and Guattari's work celebrates the schizophrenic's ability to '*scramble all the codes*' (Deleuze and Guattari 1984: 15). 'A schizophrenic out for a walk', they memorably remark, 'is a better model than a neurotic on the analyst's couch' (Deleuze and Guattari 1984: 2). By forever connecting with the outside world, the figure they contentiously abbreviate as the 'schizo' accomplishes exactly what the Oedipalized subject cannot. This is, to say the least, an unorthodox position to adopt in relation to schizophrenia. Yet it is because they take such a counter-intuitive viewpoint on mental illness that Deleuze and Guattari feel free to unfold how the 'schizo' represents the emancipation of desire:

How is it possible that the schizo was conceived of as the autistic rag – separated from the real and cut off from life – that he is so often thought to be? Worse still: how can psychiatric practice have made him this sort of rag, how can it have reduced him to this state of a body without organs that has become a dead thing – this schizo who sought to remain at that unbearable point where the mind touches matter and lives its every intensity, consumes it?

(Deleuze and Guattari 1984: 20)

Rather than consign the 'schizo' to 'another world', they uphold this figure as 'a free man, irresponsible, solitary, and joyous, finally able to say and do something simple in his own name, without asking permission' (Deleuze and Guattari 1984: 131). The 'schizo' expresses a desire 'lacking nothing'. And so they conclude: 'He has simply ceased being afraid of becoming mad'. In their companion work, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1987 [1980]), Deleuze and Guattari turn once again to the liberatory power of the desiring 'schizo', this time focusing on the need for 'schizoanalysis', as opposed to psychoanalysis. Whereas Freudian psychoanalysis 'bases its own

dictatorial power upon a dictatorial conception of the unconscious', schizoanalysis 'treats the unconscious as an acentered system' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 18). By way of elaborating the 'acentred' disposition of the unconscious and desirous 'machinic network', they employ yet another metaphor that captures the productive multivalency of libidinal energy. The metaphor in question is the 'rhizome'. A root with filaments moving in all directions, the rhizome serves as a figuration that subverts the vertical 'arborescent' structures they believe have damagingly prevailed over Western thought, especially Freudian psychoanalysis. 'We're tired of trees', they declare. 'We should stop believing in trees, roots, and radicles. They've made us suffer too much' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 15). 'Arborescent systems', we are told, 'are hierarchical systems with centres of significance and subjectification' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 16). Although they argue that the rhizome is not entirely antithetical to the tree ('[t]here are knots of arborescence in rhizomes, and rhizomatic offshoots in roots'), the rhizome remains unfettered by the top-down despotism they attribute to the root-tree model. Since it has neither a beginning nor an end, the rhizome is perhaps best seen as a suspended middle, with 'linear multiplicities' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 20–21). Operating by 'variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots', the rhizome's unpredictable lines of flight are intimately connected with sexuality. In their theory, the rhizome represents how desire thrives on a plateau of intensity: the horizontal plane without a centre upon which sexuality produces its innumerable aleatory movements.

It may well seem that 'schizoanalysis' and 'rhizomatics' operate at such a high level of abstraction that readers can only wonder at the cognitive or political reach either concept might have. But Deleuze and Guattari's influential work has been of some interest to feminist theorists seeking alternatives to the 'arborescent' phallicism inscribed in Freud's Oedipus and castration complexes and the Lacanian 'Name-of-the-Father'. Elizabeth Grosz remarks that, for some time, Deleuze and Guattari had little appeal to feminist inquiry, since *Anti-Oedipus* celebrates the arguably sexist writings of D.H. Lawrence and Henry Miller to support this machinic model of desire. (The works of both Miller and

Lawrence, it is important to note, are subject to severe criticism for their unremitting sexism in Kate Millett's influential feminist polemic, *Sexual Politics*, published in 1970. (See Chapter 2, pp. 91–93.) Yet, as Grosz observes, Deleuze and Guattari's work bears some similarities with the project of French feminist theorist Luce Irigaray (see pp. 101–2), a writer who has persistently sought to undo the phallic logic of Freudian thought. Grosz maintains that Deleuze and Guattari count among the few analysts of sexuality to follow the seventeenth-century philosopher Baruch Spinoza (1632–77) in not taking the body for granted as the locus of a conscious subject. It is, indeed, by reconceptualizing the relation between bodies and desires that Deleuze and Guattari provide feminism with the opportunity to imagine corporeality anew:

Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the body as a discontinuous, non-totalized series of processes, organs, flows, energies, corporeal substances and incorporeal events, intensities, and durations may be of great relevance to those feminists attempting to reconceive bodies, especially women's bodies, outside of the binary polarizations imposed on the body by the mind/body, nature/culture, subject/object, and interior/exterior oppositions.

(Grosz 1994: 193–94)

Especially significant to Grosz are the central sections of *A Thousand Plateaus* devoted to the concept of 'becoming-woman'. Rather than confine the concept of 'woman' to a sexed body that defines a female subject, Deleuze and Guattari elaborate two of their leading analytic terms to explain how the most dispersed libidinal energies are 'molecular' while the ones that strive to aggregate into totalities are 'molar'. In the context of 'becoming-woman', they suggest that molecular energies might be labelled 'microfemininities', since these atomized intensities rhizomatically circulate across the social field. Molar formations, by comparison, are ones that define 'woman by her form, endowed with organs and functions and assigned as a subject' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 275–76). The point, however, is that there is no hard and fast distinction between molecular and molar, since their energies

infract each other. 'Doubtless', they note, 'the girl becomes a woman in the molar or organic sense'. But, at the same time, 'girls do not belong to an age group, sex, order, or kingdom: they slip in everywhere, between orders, acts, ages, sexes' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 276–77). So even if, in the molar sense, girls shall become women, the feminine forces witnessed in 'becoming-woman' produce their molecular powers in all areas of culture. In reviewing this dialectic between molar and molecular conceptions of femininity, Grosz suggests that it faces feminist theory with a dilemma. On the one hand, experimental thinking of this kind has the virtue of releasing the category of 'woman' from a question of anatomical sexing. Yet, on the other hand, it frees femininity into such a state of scattered or formless 'becoming' that this idea could simply serve to obliterate or marginalize women's struggles. In many respects, Deleuze and Guattari are so adamant in dismantling 'arborescent' and 'molar' structures that enjoy such dominance in the world that it becomes hard to see exactly how political campaigns might be run along 'rhizomatic' and 'schizoanalytic' lines. The sceptical reader will no doubt think that *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus* are simply idealistic libertarian tracts that, no matter how much they address capitalism, have lost all contact with pragmatic action and the material world.

A similar charge could be brought against *Libidinal Economy* by Jean-François Lyotard (1924–98), an experimental work that strongly echoes *Anti-Oedipus*, and which gained notoriety when it first appeared in 1974 for its discussion of how the writings of Karl Marx (1818–83) failed to analyse their own libidinal investments. Lyotard reformulates the Freudian opposition between the death drive and the pleasure principle, thus bringing into focus once more the topic that absorbs the authors of *Anti-Oedipus*: the mechanisms that raise and lower intensities of sexual force. Although much of *Libidinal Economy* assumes that its readers already possess a working knowledge of Bataille, Freud, Lacan and Marx, among other theorists, there are sections of this frenetically written and far from user-friendly book that make Lyotard's densely allusive project plain. Following Deleuze and Guattari, Lyotard refuses to take for granted the enduring

psychoanalytic association between desire and lack. Instead of imagining a subject that must always submit to the lack he satirically personifies as the 'great Zero', Lyotard recommends that we first of all consider desire travelling the one-sided but ever-moving Moebius band. This suggestive metaphor gives Lyotard the scope to realize desire outside the binary frame of reference that keeps desire and lack locked in opposition. The Moebius band, after all, has the virtue of making it hard to tell which part is the outside and which part is the inside. Through this thought-provoking metaphor, we can glimpse the infinite dimensions to this 'immense membrane of the libidinal "body"':

It is made from the most heterogeneous textures, bone, epithelium, sheets to write on, charged atmospheres, swords, glass cases, people, grasses, canvases to paint. All these zones are joined end to end in a band which has no back to it, a Moebius band which interests us not because it is closed, but because it is one-sided, a Moebian skin which, rather than being smooth, is on the contrary (is this topologically possible?) covered with roughness, corners, creases, cavities which when it passes on the 'first' turn will be cavities, but perhaps on the 'second', lumps. But as for what turn the band is on, no-one knows nor will know, in the eternal turn.

(Lyotard 1993: 203)

Here Lyotard advances the idea of a boundless 'membrane' whose capacity for shape-changing has to some extent a precedent in Deleuze and Guattari's desiring-machines. But the more one looks at how he tries to map out a terrain for comprehending the ceaseless permutations of desire, the more it seems that Lyotard is constructing a topography whose 'cavities' and 'lumps' do not conform to the endlessly productive principle celebrated in *Anti-Oedipus*. Instead, Lyotard's libidinal 'body' – we should note his hesitant inverted commas – spreads out all its infinite metamorphoses in an 'eternal turn', almost suggesting it has a spiritual, sublime or even transcendent quality. This emphasis on eternity implies that, if Lyotard severs the connection between desire and lack, then he fuses the libido with everlasting life. 'The libido', he insists, 'never fails to invest regions, and it doesn't invest under

the rubric of lack and appropriation. It invests without condition' (Lyotard 1993: 4). Perhaps, like a free spirit, the libido refuses to be wholly bound to mortal corporeality.

But even if it seems to come from a transcendental realm, in Lyotard's scheme the libido nevertheless does not always invest its energies at a continually high level of exuberant intensity. In order to show how desire must at times slow down, he turns to the concept of the theatre: a metaphor, which he elaborates elsewhere in his work, that provides him with a means of discriminating between separable phenomena, such as stage and audience, that are none the less bound within the same structure. At such moments of what he calls 'theatricization', the bar that keeps whirling the Moebian band has to decelerate, making it possible to see a tenuous distinction between exterior and interior, between one side and another, between what he emphatically identifies as '*this*' and '*not-this*':

[E]very intensity, scorching or remote, is always *this and not-this*, not at all through the effect of castration, of repression, of ambivalence, of tragedy due to the great Zero [i.e. lack], but because intensity pertains to an asynthetic movement, more or less complex, but in any event so rapid that the surface engendered by it is, at each of its points, at the same time *this and not-this*. Of no point, of no region, however small, can one say what either is, because this region or this point has not only already disappeared when one claims to speak of it, but, in the singular or atemporal instant of intense passage, either the point or the region has been invested in from both sides at once.

(Lyotard 1993: 15)

Given the speed at which desire raises and lowers its intensities, it is perhaps not surprising that this passage faces us with a paradox. Here Lyotard declares that, at the very moment '*this*' separates from '*not-this*', it remains cognitively impossible to tell that this process has in fact occurred. For no sooner has one sought to discern the distinction between the two than they collapse back into each other, reinvesting their energies elsewhere.

How, then, can we know that '*this*' and '*not-this*' ever managed a momentary differentiation in the first place? This kind of

question really does not interest Lyotard, and for good reason. 'Why does the movement of the bar slow down?' (Lyotard 1993: 25). His answer is ingenious. 'We turn this question around, we say: when it is turning intensely, no why; your why itself results from it turning less strenuously, it is recuperative and nostalgic. The movement of the bar slows down *because*, and then this *because* ... is intensified'. In other words, theoretical inquiry in itself arrests libidinal intensity because it creates the 'theatre' where concepts and structures of representation thrive, struggling to discern what is '*this*' and '*not-this*'. He calls such an endeavour 'nihilism'. In his examination of this and related passages from *Libidinal Economy*, Geoffrey Bennington observes that Lyotard is developing a theory that openly raises the question of its own legitimacy:

[T]he primary process, the libidinal band, the death drive, are not representable insofar as they exceed and precede the whole representational set-up. And insofar as *Economie Libidinale* [*Libidinal Economy*] is concerned to talk of singularities (events), and insofar as language is the domain of generality, then it cannot deliver its objects as concepts without betraying them.

(Bennington 1988: 28)

Bennington claims that the playful and flamboyant '*dandyesque*' style of *Libidinal Economy* dramatizes how 'there can be no direct presentation of libido and the death drive' in any theoretical endeavour (Bennington 1988: 29–30). So this extraordinary work strives as much as it can against precisely the 'theatre' that its own theoretical labour must inevitably construct. Lyotard, then, cannot escape betraying the rapid movements of libidinal energy by inhibiting them in static concepts and solidifying representations.

Lyotard's critique of the 'nihilism' involved in trying theoretically to separate '*this*' from '*not-this*' gains special power when he turns the spotlight on Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Constantly provoked by this work, Lyotard asks: 'why and how can the two principles, of life and death, be assumed if they cannot be discerned through their two functions, if bound wholes can be as

congenial to life (organisms, statues, institutions, memories of all kinds) as to death (neuroses and psychoses, paranoiac confinements, lethal stable disorders of organic functions)?' (Lyotard 1993: 29). His parenthetically listed examples suggest that the distinction between qualities attributed to life and to death respectively are not only arbitrary, but also infused in each other. Like most structures of binary thinking, this type of opposition has a tendency, when put under scrutiny, to merge and dissolve its purported contraries, suggesting that ostensibly fixed antitheses are precarious at best. 'Freud', observes Lyotard, 'was well aware of these formal demands'. Like all theorists, Freud wanted 'order' in the face of libidinal disorder. Freud's mistake, it seems, was to build a theoretical system that imposed categorical divisions where there were infinite libidinal amalgamations. To Lyotard, the Freudian project is altogether too large in its ambitions, constructing an edifice that misguidedly generalizes formations of desire, thus losing contact with the ever-varying pulsations of desire. By way of correcting Freud, Lyotard claims the best method for analysing desire lies in 'examining a particular effect with patient, almost infinite care' (Lyotard 1993: 30). The painstaking descriptions to be found in the fiction of French novelist Marcel Proust (1871–1922) suggest to Lyotard a model for this type of microanalytical attentiveness.

Everywhere we look in modern French theories of desire, the question of thinking about the libido in economic terms throws increasing light on how the grand designs of any theoretical system will ultimately be defeated by desire. This point becomes evident in Jean Baudrillard's *Seduction*. Published in 1979, this work has clearly absorbed the 'molecular' revolution of Deleuze and Guattari's thought. But whereas *Anti-Oedipus* claims that libidinal energy is ceaselessly productive, Baudrillard attempts to go one better by declaring that it is precisely the productive nature of sex that deludes us. In the place of *production*, Baudrillard advances the significance of *seduction*:

One may catch a glimpse of another, parallel universe (the two never meet) with the decline of psychoanalysis and sexuality as strong structures, and their cleansing with a *psy* and molecular universe (that

of their final liberation). A universe that can no longer be interpreted in terms of psychic or psychological relations, nor those of repression and the unconscious, but must be interpreted in the terms of play, challenges, duels, the strategy of appearances – that is, the terms of seduction.

(Baudrillard 1990: 7)

How, then, might we conceptualize the 'play' of seduction? To answer this query, Baudrillard makes a rather contradictory response to feminist politics. To begin with, he claims that Freud was right in viewing sexuality as phallic; its masculinism cannot be denied. Women's lives, argues Baudrillard, are constantly threatened by the phallic order. This view leads him to emphasize how, in women's struggles for liberation, the 'danger ... for the female is that she will be enclosed within a structure that condemns her to either discrimination when the structure is strong, or a derisory triumph within a weakened structure' (Baudrillard 1990: 6). In other words, women cannot benefit from gaining an equal place in a phallic order, since to do so would plainly perpetuate a patriarchal system. (He seems to be unaware how feminism has for decades reflected carefully on this problem.) Yet rather than suggest how women's liberation might transform the patriarchal hegemony, Baudrillard bemoans the fact that feminists seem uninterested in what he feels is the most subversive quality attributed to femininity: seduction. So he is led to assert, somewhat condescendingly, that the women's movement does 'not understand *that seduction represents mastery over the symbolic universe, while power represents only mastery of the real universe*' (Baudrillard 1990: 8). For the moment, it almost sounds as if Baudrillard is advising feminists to adopt the role of those *femmes fatales* and seductive temptresses familiar to many narrative and film genres.

Baudrillard is certainly aware of the sexist implications of the stereotypical way he is gendering seduction. But he declares that, even if 'one calls the sovereignty of seduction feminine by convention' (Baudrillard 1990: 7), femininity none the less retains the monopoly on artifice, appearances, illusions. Not for a moment will Baudrillard entertain either Irigaray's appeal to the

non-phallic libidinal economy of the female body or Deleuze and Guattari's metaphor of the body without organs. From his perspective, each of these writers reduces desire – either literally or figuratively – to a question of anatomy.

An altogether more helpful way of thinking about the symbolic power exerted by feminine seduction lies for him in a famous essay by British psychoanalyst Joan Riviere (1883–1962) first published in 1929. In 'Womanliness as a Masquerade', Riviere influentially observes the conflicts that arise when professional women assume and wear womanliness 'as a mask' to secure their place in a male-dominated world. Riviere believes that this 'masquerade' of femininity, even if compromised in the face of male authority, can allow the intellectual woman 'both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it – much as a thief will turn out his pockets and ask to be searched to prove that he has not stolen the goods' (Riviere 1986: 38). By idealizing feminine 'masquerade', Baudrillard observes how masculinity, by contrast, aggrandizes itself on the dangerous pretence that it 'possesses unfailing powers of discrimination and absolute criteria for pronouncing the truth'. He finds femininity altogether preferable because it blurs the distinction between 'authenticity and artifice', thus manipulating the seductive realm of 'simulation': a term that absorbs many of his studies devoted to the symbolic regimes that govern the current postmodern world (Baudrillard 1990: 10–11). It is as if Baudrillard himself were seduced by a highly uncritical notion of feminine seduction.

But why should the symbolic seductiveness of the feminine be elevated over and above the masculinist imperative to claim truth and certainty? What precisely is at stake for Baudrillard in identifying these gendered contraries? The answer returns us, as it does in both *Anti-Oedipus* and *Libidinal Economy*, to capitalism. He maintains that just as capitalist economies stress production, so too do modern understandings of sex proceed with this relentlessly productive logic in mind. Although one wonders to what degree Baudrillard believes that capitalism shapes and determines modern understandings of sex, his argument gains some plausibility if we consider for a moment how in Victorian Britain the

verb 'to spend' was sexual slang for male ejaculation. Even today in the pornography industry, 'cum' scenes are frequently known as 'money shots'. With these points in mind, let us look at how Baudrillard pieces sex and capital together:

Ours is a culture of premature ejaculation. Increasingly, all seduction, all manner of enticement – which is always a highly *ritualized* process – is effaced behind a *naturalized* sexual imperative, behind the immediate and imperative realization of desire. Our centre of gravity has been displaced towards a libidinal economy concerned with only the naturalization of desire, a desire dedicated to drives, or to a machine-like functioning. ... This pressure towards liquidity, flux and the accelerated articulation of the sexual, psychic and physical body is an exact replica of that which regulates exchange value: capital must circulate, there must no longer be any fixed point, investments must be ceaselessly renewed, value must radiate without respite – this is the form of value's present realization, and sexuality, the sexual *model*, is simply its mode of appearance at the level of the body.

(Baudrillard 1990: 38)

Here Baudrillard proposes that sexuality turns the body over into the service of capital, making it a value-producing machine that must continually reinvest its energies to keep the system going. It is as if the libido paralleled labour-power, and the regime of sexuality resembled the capitalist eager to seize on the surplus-value that accrues. To Baudrillard, sex is like human labour because it is a natural energy that Western culture demands should be treated in an entrepreneurial spirit. Even if this correlation between sex and capital might not hold up to much further scrutiny, it is intriguing to see how Baudrillard is led to observe that 'sexuality, desire and pleasure are *subaltern* values' (Baudrillard 1990: 39). In using the epithet '*subaltern*', he is referring to values associated with subjected groups that embody a fundamental energy which capitalism seeks to harness. He notes that, when they first appeared in the West, sexuality, desire and pleasure were viewed as 'fallen' values, in so far as they made a striking contrast with the 'aristocratic values of birth and blood, valour and seduction, or the collective values of religion and

sacrifice' (Baudrillard 1990: 39). At this point, it becomes clear that he feels seduction is not only the province of femininity, but also a structure that belongs to the *ancien régime*. Seduction, therefore, begins to sound as if it is feminine, simulational and archaic all at once. In the meantime, sexuality, desire and pleasure would appear to stem from the productive labour of the insurgent *nouveaux riches*, whose masculinist desire to conquer the real world shall continue into the foreseeable future.

The distinctly modern masculinism of desire emerges for Baudrillard most forcefully in pornography. In this genre of sexual representation, he argues, there is a lamentable 'excess of "reality"' (Baudrillard 1990: 28). Although he claims we may be tempted to believe along psychoanalytic lines that pornography presents a phantasmatic regime in which various fetishes and perversions are put into play, the only illusion it upholds is paradoxically a fantasy of the real: a 'hyperreality' in which any distinction between representation and the actual world collapses altogether. So Baudrillard charges pornography for having a 'sham vision', such is its pretence to reality (Baudrillard 1990: 31). Instead of providing a seductive world of rituals and apparitions that sustain the endless pleasures of seduction, all pornography can do is act out the deadening machinations of capital. He bluntly sums up this malaise in the following bleak equation: 'The realist corruption of sex, the productivist corruption of labour – same symptoms, same combat.'

But if pornography, according to Baudrillard, provides an example of 'reality' taken to a higher inflated power, then he assures us that seduction has not entirely departed from the world. Although he feels we may continue to struggle beneath the yoke of 'productivist corruption', seduction has none the less found its way into other areas of our lives, most evidently across the endless interfaces with computer and information technology. Yet he is quick to point out that our experiences at the interface are hardly seductive in the playful, artificial, feminine sense with which he began his study, and which wields symbolic power. Instead, the technological manipulation of simulated images comprises nothing more than a '*cold seduction*': 'the "narcissistic" spell of electronic and information systems, the cold attraction of

the terminals and mediums that we have become, surrounded as we are by consoles, isolated and seduced by their manipulation' (Baudrillard 1990: 162). In techno-simulation, then, we experience seduction in its 'disenchanted form' (Baudrillard 1990: 180). But since seduction, for Baudrillard, has the capacity to elude production, it may well turn out that it will never be fully absorbed by the technologies that render it 'cold'. His book leaves us on a suspended note, wondering how indeed seduction will outlast the productivist imperative, and how it might regain its charming feminine illusoriness. Given the rise of phone sex, pornography on the internet, and other sexual services involving computer technology, one wonders if this realm of simulation really retains, as Baudrillard suggests, even the '*cold seduction*' of artifice. Possibly this world of technological simulation belongs to the same arena of pornographic 'hyperreality': a field of vision in which actual and virtual at times become inseparable. (Some might argue, however, that it is precisely this realm of electronic 'hyperreality' that permits unrealized erotic desires to be liberated into cyberspace, leaving our experience of technological seduction anything but 'cold'.)

French cultural critic Roland Barthes (1915–80) largely shares Baudrillard's despondent view of pornography. Throughout *The Pleasure of the Text* (1975 [1973]), Barthes draws thoughtful aperçus of how the greatest pleasures emerge from the '*unpredictability* of bliss' (Barthes 1975: 4). Maybe like Baudrillard's seduction, such bliss or *jouissance* can never be known in advance. Barthes emphasizes how 'corporeal striptease' and 'narrative suspense' are limited pleasures, since they simply cannot compare with 'perversion', which he equates with 'intermittence': 'skin flashing between two articles of clothing' (Barthes 1975: 10). It is, he claims, this intermittent 'flash itself which seduces, or rather: the staging of an appearance-as-disappearance'. Here, then, we have the pleasure of revelation and concealment, laid bare and covered in a movement that always remains in process. Turn, however, to modern pornography, and one quickly sees the level of disaffection with its limited eroticism. Since pornography is designed to lead its consumers towards an orgasmic climax, it must ultimately terminate desire:

So-called 'erotic' books (one must add: of recent vintage, in order to except Sade and a few others) *represent* not so much the erotic scene as the expectation of it, the preparation for it, its ascent; that is what makes them 'exciting'; and even when the scene occurs, naturally there is disappointment, deflation.

(Barthes 1975: 58)

Since it is frequently used for masturbation, pornography promises much excitement. But pornography ultimately proves dissatisfying, since the desire on which it draws must hurl itself headlong towards the 'little death'. That is why Barthes argues that so-called 'erotic' books represent '[p]leasure *as seen by psycho-analysis*', by which he probably means a model of desire built upon the psychic competition between Eros and Thanatos dramatized in Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Both forces, after all, converge in heterosexual orgasm, and thus come to an abrupt end. In pornography, therefore, modern cultural theorists come up against the constraining limits of what it means to imagine sexuality as a phenomenon driven by rivalrous energies of life and death.

There is no doubt that pornography has faced modern culture with extremely difficult questions about the ways in which sexuality appears uncontrollably to surge forth only to encounter its 'little death'. More than any other type of sexual representation, pornography has frequently focused deep-seated cultural anxieties about the (de)generating pleasures that arise from the conflicted libido. These anxieties about the pains and pleasures of eroticism emerge most clearly in the vigorous, if acutely divided, feminist discussion of pornography. Developing in the 1970s and persisting to this day, this significant debate opens up a wide range of perspectives on how we can best approach the moral and political dimensions to the volatile sexual energies that Freud identified many decades before.

PORNOGRAPHIC MATERIALS

'Pornography is the theory, and rape the practice', wrote radical feminist Robin Morgan in 1980 (Morgan 1980: 139). This

memorable slogan has certainly left its imprint on feminist discussions about the links between pornography and sexual violence against women. This debate absorbed much feminist energy in the mid-1970s and 1980s. In many respects, this is still a decidedly controversial topic that divides activists and intellectuals working for women's liberation. Radical feminists (stressing a woman-centred analysis of culture) and socialist feminists (emphasizing women's struggles as an oppressed class) have often differed in their understandings of pornography.

Until radical feminists such as Morgan asserted that rape resulted from pornographic representation, the polemic about sexually explicit materials had largely been conducted in terms of how the law regulated obscenity. Even then, it needs to be borne in mind that legislation dealing with obscene and indecent materials did not always focus on what modern culture has come to regard as pornography. In England and Wales, for example, the Obscene Publications Act (1857) was used in the Victorian period to outlaw the publication and circulation of birth-control pamphlets by free-thinkers and feminists. Perhaps it is no accident that in the same year, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word pornography itself entered the English language. Unquestionably, by the mid-nineteenth century there was a regime of sexual representation that bears striking resemblance to the visual systems that would be currently classed as pornography. But the point is that it was only then that this identifiable genre was associated exclusively with eroticism. 'In early modern Europe, that is, between 1500 and 1800', observes Lynn Hunt, what would become known as 'pornography was most often a vehicle for using the shock of sex to criticize religious and political authorities' (Hunt 1993: 10). Hunt comments that between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, satirical and seditious writings that exploited sexual imagery circulated only among an educated elite. Following the illuminating researches of Walter Kendrick (Kendrick 1987), Hunt remarks that it was through the subsequent rise of literacy, the extension of print culture and the gradual commodification of erotic representations in the Victorian era that pornography as we now perceive it came into its own (Hunt 1993: 12–13). Ever since this moment in history,

competing defences, definitions and denunciations of pornography have provided a testing-ground for ethical, moral and social values. So what exactly encouraged radical feminists to break with the longstanding belief that pornography was an issue about obscenity? What led radical feminism to consider pornography as the cause of violent sex crimes such as rape?

It is sometimes asserted that pornography became an urgent campaigning issue because it gave the Women's Liberation Movement a common purpose at a time when the political direction of feminism was internally under factional strain. Rather than adopt the traditional standpoint on whether pornographic representation broke the law on the grounds of obscenity, radical feminists attacked pornography because they felt it starkly dramatized the systematic subordination of women. Whereas established debates about obscenity focused on how the subject consuming pornographic materials might become morally degenerate, radical feminist analyses stressed how pornography degraded women as sexual objects. Susanne Kappeler clarifies this distinction when she writes:

Feminist critique is concerned with sexism, not with indecency or obscenity. The values of 'obscene' and 'indecent' change with changing mores; in particular, they are middle-class values of proven duplicity. They are part of the make-up of the society's constructed self-image. The setters of standards to whom indecencies and obscenities are offensive do not seem to share the values of women to whom pornography is offensive.

(Kappeler 1986: 25)

By concentrating on sexism, rather than obscenity, radical feminism claimed that hard-core pornography in particular led to the most appalling forms of sexual abuse, both within the industry that produced this commodity and at the hands of the ever-growing market of largely male consumers. If pornography was the theory that led to rape, then it was patently instrumental in many barbarous sex crimes committed by men.

Radical feminist perspectives on graphic sexual materials inspired several notable writers to adopt an immensely powerful

rhetoric to further its leading claims. In the same collection that features Morgan's famous motto, the American essayist, novelist and political campaigner Andrea Dworkin (1946–2005) takes her epigraphs from the Old Testament to underscore the prophetic biblical tone of her offensive against so-called 'radical' men's failures to reject pornography:

Men love death. In everything they make, they hollow out a central place for death, let its rancid smell contaminate every dimension of whatever still survives. Men especially love murder. In art they celebrate it, and in life they commit it. They embrace murder as if life would be devoid of passion, meaning and action, as if murder were solace, stilling their sobs as they mourn the emptiness and alienation of their lives.

(Dworkin 1980: 148)

Reading this series of proclamations, one would imagine that male sexuality was driven solely and utterly by a murderous instinct. Dworkin suggests that even politically 'radical' men find in pornography an ideal means of regaining the virility that has for some time been waning in the United States. She identifies two main reasons for this weakening of masculine potency. The one is the castratory impact of the military fiascos that sustained the Vietnam War (1955–75), while the other is 'the revolutionary militance of the women' during the same period (Dworkin 1980: 153). Between military incompetence and militant feminism, Dworkin states, a whole generation of men was left in a dilemma. 'The sons, dispossessed, did have a choice: to bond with the fathers to crush the women or to ally themselves with the women against the tyranny of all phallic power, including their own' (Dworkin 1980: 153). But rather than unite with feminists, these 'sons' turned to pornography instead, striving to maintain the supremacy of the penis. Having spelt out the violence of pornography in her own decisive chapter and verse, Dworkin's numerous later writings specify exactly why sexually explicit materials are such a source of moral outrage to feminism.

Throughout her polemical full-length study, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (1989 [1979]), Dworkin describes in overwhelming

detail a great many scenes from pornographic publications, each of which in her view make hatred of women glaringly evident. Discussing a picture titled 'Beaver Hunters' from the magazine *Hustler*, Dworkin carefully details the sexual violence staged in this scene:

Two white men, dressed as hunters, sit in a black Jeep. The Jeep occupies almost the whole frame of the picture. The two men carry rifles. The rifles extend above the frame of the photograph in the white space surrounding it. The men and the Jeep face into the camera. Tied onto the hood of the black Jeep is a white woman. She is tied with thick rope. She is spread-eagle. Her pubic hair and crotch are the dead centre of the car hood and the photograph. Her head is turned to one side, tied down by rope that is pulled taut across her neck, extended to and wrapped several times around her wrists.

(Dworkin 1989: 26)

Dworkin's description continues by itemizing exactly which other parts of the woman's body in this bondage scene are tied by the endless length of criss-crossing rope. She draws attention to how a bumper sticker is placed between the woman's legs. Alluding to the brother of US President Jimmy Carter, the sticker reads: 'I brake for Billy Carter'. (This is a cultural reference, whose meaning Dworkin does not explain.) To complete the picture, *Hustler* furnishes three contemptuous sentences that summarize the drama depicted here: 'Western sportsmen report beaver hunting was particularly good through the Rocky Mountain region during the past season. These two hunters easily bagged their limit in the high country. They told HUSTLER that they stuffed and mounted their trophy as soon as they got her home'. To Dworkin, this repugnant picture directly communicates the idea that men are hunters (they wield phallic guns) while women are to be treated as nothing more than captured animals (a 'beaver' is American sexual slang for a woman's crotch). 'Terror', writes Dworkin, 'is finally the content of the photograph, and it is also its effect on the female observer' (Dworkin 1989: 27). Since, from Dworkin's perspective, this image has special appeal to woman-hating men, she claims it will doubtless 'evoke fear' in

the female spectator, 'unless she entirely dissociates herself from the photograph: refuses to believe or understand that real persons posed for it, refuses to see the bound person as a woman like herself' (Dworkin 1989: 27). It proves impossible for Dworkin herself to view 'Beaver Hunters' as anything other than a brutal reality. Recoiling from this picture, Dworkin professes this shocking image relays how the 'power of sex is ultimately defined as the power of conquest' (Dworkin 1989: 30). Not only does the picture display 'the nonconsensual character of the event', it also implies how the 'power of sex, in male terms, is also funereal'. 'Death permeates it', states Dworkin.

By regarding such pornography as the ultimate testament of men's deathly misogyny, Dworkin worked together with a distinguished law professor, Catharine A. MacKinnon, on a widely publicized campaign that aimed to shield women from the assumed harms that stemmed from the violent sexual fantasies represented in the pages of *Hustler* and similar magazines and films. In 1983, Dworkin and MacKinnon formulated a Minneapolis city ordinance that both defined the production, sale, display and circulation of pornography and allowed victims of sexual violence attributable to such material to claim damages. This city ordinance was based on a platform of civil rights whose goal was to protect two groups: (1) those whose lives have been violently exploited within the pornography industry; and (2) those whose minds and bodies have been subject to abuse by its consumers. In the same spirit as Dworkin, MacKinnon claims that pornography 'institutionalizes the sexuality of male supremacy, fusing the eroticization of domination and submission with the social construction of male and female' (MacKinnon 1992: 462). Contrary to earlier analyses, such as Susan Sontag's (1933–2004), that stress the varying styles and genres of pornography (Sontag 1969), MacKinnon flatly declares that this form of eroticism 'is not a distortion, reflection, projection, expression, fantasy, representation or symbol either'. 'It is', MacKinnon insists, 'a sexual reality' (MacKinnon 1992: 462). In a later essay, MacKinnon underscores this point: 'Pornography does not simply express or interpret experience; it substitutes for it' (MacKinnon 1993: 25).

Since both Dworkin and MacKinnon lay such a complete emphasis on the *reality* presented by what others might perceive as a *representational* domain, they regard pornography as the lived world in which terrifying sexual inequalities persist. 'Pornography', writes MacKinnon, 'defines women by how we look according to how we can be sexually used' (MacKinnon 1992: 463). In almost identical terms, Dworkin sees the definitional power that pornography cruelly exerts over women's lives. But she takes the logic of this claim to its absolute limit:

At the heart of the female condition is pornography: it is the ideology that is the source of all the rest; it truly defines what women are in this system – and how women are treated issues from what women are. Pornography is not a metaphor for what women *are*; it is what women are in theory and in practice.

(Dworkin 1983: 223)

According to this argument, pornography must be viewed as an *action* that keeps women locked in a vicious all-encompassing system. Dworkin believes pornography presents *both the cause and the effect* of women's sexual subordination. So, on this view, only when our culture abolishes pornography can the liberation of women truly begin.

In order to counter the violence they attribute to pornography, Dworkin and MacKinnon produced a comprehensive definition of such material for the ordinance they presented to the city of Minneapolis in 1983, and which was passed by the City Council the following year. It is worth quoting this definition in full, since it spells out in precise terms exactly what constitutes their understanding of the systematic *dehumanization* and *objectification* evident in *Hustler* and its ilk:

Pornography means the graphic sexually explicit subordination of women through pictures and/or words that also includes one or more of the following: (i) women are presented dehumanized as sexual objects, things, or commodities; or (ii) women are presented as sexual objects who enjoy humiliation or pain; or (iii) women are presented as sexual objects experiencing pleasure in rape, incest or

other sexual assault; or (iv) women are presented as sexual objects tied up, cut up or mutilated or bruised or physically hurt; or (v) women are presented in postures or positions of sexual submission, servility, or display; or (vi) women's body parts – including but not limited to vaginas, breasts, or buttocks – are exhibited such that women are reduced to those parts; or (vii) women are presented being penetrated by objects and animals; or (viii) women are presented in scenarios of degradation, humiliation, injury, torture, shown as filthy or inferior, bleeding, bruised, or hurt in a context that makes these conditions sexual.

(Itzin 1992a: 435–36)

On no account does this highly inclusive definition admit that scenes involving domination and submission, bondage or other styles of 'humiliation' or 'degradation' may have been either contractually agreed or staged in a non-injurious manner. Dworkin and MacKinnon's point is that such depictions enact harmful types of conduct that frighten, offend, and even seriously endanger women. Even though Dworkin and MacKinnon state categorically that this exhaustive definition must be detached from conventional views of obscenity, the ordinance itself was championed by moralistic conservatives who wished to see pornography outlawed on traditional grounds of indecency. This victory was short-lived. No sooner had this alliance between radical feminists and the Moral Right persuaded the City Council that pornography affronted civil rights than the mayor vetoed the ordinance. When a redrafted version of the document was subsequently adopted by Indianapolis City Council, it was declared unconstitutional because it violated the First Amendment of the United States Constitution – namely, the amendment that protects free speech. Although these ordinances proved unsuccessful in the United States, campaigns were organized to ensure that similar legislation would be implemented in Britain. (No such legislation of this kind has been passed in the UK.)

In solidarity with Dworkin and MacKinnon's political agenda, Catherine Itzin (1944–2010) published a collection of essays that aim to show how pornography lies at the root of child sexual abuse, sexual addiction and pathological erotic behaviour. In one of these

articles, Diana E.H. Russell highlights psychological experiments conducted with male students which repeatedly reveal that increasing exposure to pornography result in an escalating 'proclivity to rape' (Russell 1992: 313). Scientific experiments have been conducted in laboratory conditions to measure the degree of penile tumescence that men experience when viewing pornographic scenes of rape. As part of the test, male subjects are asked to report on the fantasies they had when watching such material. Taken together, the results from these laboratory trials suggest to Russell that the majority 'of male students – not the most violent subpopulation in US culture – admit there is some likelihood that they would rape or sexually assault a woman if they could be assured of getting away with it' (Russell 1992: 326). Shocked by these responses, Russell concludes that '*most men have at least some predisposition to rape women*'. By any account, this is a drastic inference to make. Faced with such frightening data, Itzin finds it hard to believe that anyone could object to legislation modelled on the Minneapolis ordinance. She observes that lesbian and gay activists were severely critical of the original ordinance because it included within its definition a clause stating that 'the use of men ... or transsexuals in the place of women is also pornography' (Itzin 1992a: 443).

Given that same-sex desire remains oppressed and stigmatized at different levels of society, many lesbian and gay campaigners understandably feared that any appeal to the law would simply extend the power of the state to persecute sexual minorities. In 1985, for example, the London Metropolitan Police conducted a raid on Gay's the Word Bookshop, seizing over a thousand sundry titles, including classic works of literature, gay erotica and life-saving information about safer sex. This police raid certainly accentuated the vexed question of what materials count as 'pornographic' in the eyes of the law. Similarly, gay male practitioners of consensual sadomasochism (SM) in the UK were particularly vulnerable to state violence during that period. In 1990, after the police seized a video tape made for private circulation among a group engaging in consensual SM, the Director of Public Prosecutions brought charges that resulted in prison sentences. But Itzin will have no truck with defences made in the

name of oppressed sexual communities in the light of such events. 'These gays and lesbians', she writes, 'apparently believe their right to use sadistic pornography takes precedence over considerations of sexual violence to women and sex discrimination' (Itzin 1992a: 444). From what Itzin says, it would appear that the battle lines in this debate are drawn up between lesbian and gay libertarians, on the one hand, and feminist supporters of women's civil rights, on the other hand.

This, however, is a distorted picture. If Dworkin and MacKinnon's ordinance has been loudly contested by any political movement, then that challenge has come from another wing of feminism – a feminism which claims that such legislation will only worsen women's lives, especially by appealing to legal institutions that have traditionally paid little respect towards women's sexual freedoms. By implying that her work speaks on behalf of all feminists, therefore, Itzin fails to represent the views of women committed to an altogether different model of civil liberties and sexual emancipation. So at this juncture we need to examine briefly those feminist positions that contest the belief that 'pornography is the theory, rape the practice'.

In their lucid pamphlet, *Pornography and Feminism* (1991), the British collective Feminists against Censorship argue that Dworkin and MacKinnon stand at the vanguard of a movement that seriously fails to question the cause-and-effect model that supposedly explains what pornography is and does. Although they unquestionably accept that pornography gives considerable offence to many women, Feminists against Censorship observe that it is misguided to assert that graphic sexual images necessarily encourage male consumers to perform violent sexual assaults. The problem, as they see it, lies in the way supporters of the Dworkin–MacKinnon ordinance maintain two erroneous beliefs. The first is that society constructs gender differences in bleakly dualistic terms, making men into active abusers and women passive victims. The second is that pornography brainwashes men. Both beliefs, claim Feminists against Censorship, assume the same deterministic logic. What is more, they state that each of these beliefs betrays naïve behaviourism. 'Behaviourists', the collective notes, 'believe that attitudes and responses are the result of

“conditioning” or education’. In this respect, one might reflect for a moment on Itzin’s approach to sexual ‘conditioning’: ‘Women are coercively and painfully socialized into femininity’. Likewise, Itzin argues: ‘Women are conditioned to conform to the stereotyped images of femininity and womanhood in such a way that they are often unaware that they are misrepresented and mistreated’ (Itzin 1992b: 161–62).

By confronting such ‘behaviourist’ psychology, Feminists against Censorship accept that ‘it is true that we learn to behave in certain ways’. Yet they add a crucial caveat by stressing how ‘behaviourists miss out the vital element of self-consciousness, reflective and reasoning power and emotional response’ (Feminists against Censorship 1991: 34–35). Their scepticism towards behaviourism means that they seriously doubt the findings that Itzin and Russell garner to support the view that pornography creates a ‘proclivity to rape’. ‘The evidence from psychological experiments’, write Feminists against Censorship, ‘is conflicting and unsatisfactory’. Noting that this type of laboratory-based research ‘must be treated with caution’, the collective identifies three main limitations to these psychological inquiries.

- (1) These experiments pay little attention to the fact that the interviews are full of leading questions: ‘The subjects may “report” what they think the experimenter wants to hear.’
- (2) These reports do not indicate whether non-pornographic violence causes arousal.
- (3) The studies are conducted in entirely artificial conditions, failing to reveal where pornography fits into men’s everyday lives.

Furthermore, these scientific investigations do not entertain the idea that ‘pornography offers a form of release to those who might otherwise commit acts of violence’ (Feminists against Censorship 1991: 53).

What action, then, do Feminists against Censorship feel should be taken on pornography? Having questioned the fundamental behaviourist assumptions underpinning the belief that ‘pornography is the theory, rape the practice’, they conclude that

Dworkin 'has got the problem turned upside down' (Feminists against Censorship 1991: 67). 'Pornography', they state, 'may mirror the sexism of society but did not create it'. From their point of view, if feminists use legislation to protect women from pornography, then the consequences for the free expression of women's sexuality could be considerable. To their minds, just at the point when women are beginning to take greater control of their sexual lives, attacks on pornography threaten to restrict even further sexually explicit materials that adult women may themselves enjoy. 'Many women', they contend, 'are taking risks to produce feminist sexual images, images which do not exploit either the viewer or the producer' (Feminists against Censorship 1991: 74). Consequently, they regard pornography as completely the wrong target for feminist campaigns against patriarchal dominance. In demanding greater freedom of expression in all areas of society, Feminists against Censorship urge that 'the real battle is elsewhere: it is the battle against public and private violence, against unequal pay structures, against a lack of opportunities for girls and women' (Feminists against Censorship 1991: 75).

Set side by side, the Dworkin–MacKinnon ordinance and the pamphlet by Feminists against Censorship bring into very sharp focus contrasting approaches to pornography and its complicated relations to both sexual inequality and sexual desire. Some feminist critics, however, have been troubled by the polarized nature of this debate, and have therefore sought to establish a middle ground that accepts aspects of both the anti-pornography and anti-censorship viewpoints. One writer who mediates between these antithetical positions is Drucilla Cornell, an American legal theorist. Cornell argues that all human subjects should have the right to an 'imaginary domain' in which they can operate on a day-to-day basis without being systematically oppressed because of their class, race, gender or any other perceived mark of difference. In developing this concept of an 'imaginary domain', Cornell draws on Lacanian psychoanalytic thought to emphasize the struggles each and every one of us endures in our search for a coherent and sustaining self-image. She contends that, when pornography is displayed in the public sphere, it makes for

'enforced viewing' that wrongly encroaches both 'on psychic space and on bodily integrity' (Cornell 1995: 104–5). In Cornell's view, this is a rather different argument from saying that pornography is basically offensive to women. Instead, her discussion concentrates on types of regulation that permit free access to pornography, if restricting it from emblazoning its images within the public realm. Cornell recommends the practice of 'zoning', a practice which outlaws the imposition of graphic sexual representation on the streets and in the workplace, but which does not prevent retailers from selling erotic materials behind closed doors:

The type of zoning that I advocate does protect the imaginary domain of each one of us, including those of us who wish to have easy access to pornographic materials. It is important to stress that the justification does not turn on the concept that these materials are offensive. I am more than sympathetic that these materials, even as they present the mainstream heterosexual scene, can be used by viewers in different ways to explore aspects of their sexuality that go way beyond the scene as it is rigidly played out.

(Cornell 1995: 162)

Through this type of 'zoning', Cornell believes that everyone has the maximum opportunity to develop his or her 'imaginary domain'.

Like Feminists against Censorship, Cornell strongly disputes the belief that pornography actualizes or enacts the real conditions of women's subordination. Rather, Cornell claims that sexually explicit materials inhabit a realm of *representation*. If we attend closely to the representational qualities of pornography, then it becomes possible to imagine that its graphic erotic content produces, not a literal reality, but a wholesale myth. If this is indeed the case, then could it be that magazines such as *Hustler* represent violence against women precisely because men feel anxious and defensive about their own sexualities? Contemplating this question, Cornell turns to psychoanalysis to explain the ways in which pornography, especially in its most frenzied forms, obsessively returns heterosexual men to an event that scarred their unconscious at an early age: the traumatic Oedipal discovery that the

mother is castrated. 'The pornographic scene', argues Cornell, 'has to be repeated because the Phallic Mother, pushed under, dismembered, ripped apart, will always return on the level of the unconscious' (Cornell 1995: 130). Since, on this view, some heterosexual men still find it psychically difficult to imagine that the mother is not phallic, pornography exploits this fantasy by reactivating an erotic rage that reduces what was once a source of unconditional maternal love to a distressing site of castratory absence.

Cornell is hardly alone in maintaining this psychoanalytic viewpoint. English writer Angela Carter (1940–92) takes a similar critical approach to the psychic anguish men experience when consuming violent pornography: 'The whippings, the beatings, the gougings, the stabbings of erotic violence reawaken the memory of the social fiction of the female wound, the bleeding scar left by her castration, which is a psychic fiction as deeply at the heart of Western culture as the myth of Oedipus, to which it is related in the complex dialectic of imagination and reality that produces culture' (Carter 1979: 23). Seen from this Freudian position, the Oedipal rage against the mother also involves the boy's anxiety about his own symbolic castration: the loss of the vital organ that represents the privilege of male power. Bearing this point in mind, Lynne Segal remarks that, when using pornography, men are probably in 'need of reassurance through fantasies of control over others' (Segal 1992: 77). She maintains that, in arguing '[a]gainst feminist anti-pornography discourse on the power and danger of male sexual domination, it is crucial to emphasize how the phallus as a symbol functions primarily to hide, as well as to create and sustain, the severe anxieties and fears attaching to the penis' (Segal 1992: 83). She implies that there is much to be gained politically by demystifying the conflicted relationship between the penis and phallus. In other words, there needs to be a developed discussion of how and why the male sexual organ will never measure up to the mythical power accorded to it.

Pursuing a similar insight, Linda Williams suggests that pornographic films, rather than displaying a sexual reality, frequently strive to represent erotic acts that are by definition impossible to

visualize. The author of a comprehensive study of different genres of hard-core pornography, Williams observes that, if there was one moment that hard-core genres seek to capture, then it is 'the climactic "it" of ultimate pleasure': the ejaculating penis caught in the 'money shot' (Williams 1992: 242). But these films reveal that the pinnacle of pleasure represented by the 'money shot' is 'a paradoxical confession'. Reflecting on the way countless works of this kind stage the highly prized 'money shot', Williams contends:

For while it ['the money shot'] afforded a perfect vision and knowledge of one genital organ's pleasure, the climax and achievement of a final sexual aim, this aim quite literally missed its mark: the genitals of its object. In fact, the 'object' of masculine desire and pleasure is often missing altogether as a visual representation in the frame.

(Williams 1992: 242)

In making this comment, Williams encourages us to think twice about what might be the precise appeal of pornography to male heterosexual consumers. On the one hand, this type of sexual representation leads towards the orgasmic penetration of the woman's genitals. But, on the other hand, since it is by definition impossible to bring the man's ejaculatory experience during penetration within the visual field, the 'money shot' is often staged in incredibly elaborate ways – including the use of slow motion and multiple angles – to compensate, as much as possible, for what simply cannot be seen. What is more, the repeated emphasis on male ejaculation in these films surely raises questions about what the male spectator should feel is the precise object of desire. Does the man's ejaculation provide the climactic moment when the male viewer *identifies with* the symbolic superiority of the phallus? Or does the 'money shot' suggest that this same viewer *desires* the penis more than the woman's body? Given how pornographic films devise special techniques for restaging the 'money shot', it proves difficult to give a definite answer to either question. Since the 'money shot' appears as such a 'paradoxical confession', Williams declares that it animates 'the frenzy of the visible', the urgency with which pornography struggles to glorify an ecstatic moment that cannot be captured on film. In her view,

the 'money shot' stands as a perverse substitution which, like Freud's conception of the fetish, seeks to sustain a desire in the face of castrating loss. Such, we might think, are the lengths to which pornography will go when trying to withstand the treacherous 'little death'.

Throughout her full-length study, *Hard Core* (1989), Williams shows how various cinematic devices routinely employed in pornographic films follow the elaborate substitutive pattern of the 'money shot'. Here one might compare the so-called 'meat shot'. This type of shot ushers the camera as far as it can towards the female genitals, attempting to display the woman's sexual pleasure in the closest possible detail. But like the 'money shot', too, this complex visual technique faces a preposterous task. In the 'meat shot', the camera may at times supplant the penis that must be obligingly withdrawn for the purpose of this scene. On other occasions, the camera may give way to someone else's penis penetrating the woman. These multiple substitutions once more accelerate the 'frenzy of the visible':

[W]e can see that it [the 'meat shot'] oscillates restlessly between genital show and genital event, sometimes signifying climax, culmination, possession, other times signifying the undeniable fact that the 'scopic regime' of cinema cannot depict such climax, culmination, possession, simply because the event of climactic pleasure cannot be shown. Thus we begin to see as well the dynamic of change that the cinematic process of compensation / disavowal involves: since he cannot touch the woman, the spectator gets to see more of her; but seeing more means confronting the hidden 'wonders' of sexual difference, which in turn may create the further need to prove masculinity by watching someone else going *inside*.

(Williams 1989: 83)

Seeing and not seeing, penetrating and withdrawing, compensating and disavowing: these are the contradictory structures that, for Williams, generate ever insatiable but always dissatisfied desires of various pornographic genres. Having viewed many different types of pornographic film, Williams concludes: 'pornography, in formulating sexual pleasure as a problem, with solutions

involving the need for further sex and further speculation about sex, begets pornography' (Williams 1989: 276). So, in aiming to ascertain the ultimate truth of sex, pornography only uncovers interminable erotic mysteries it feels driven to explore.

Given that pornography has an exceptional capacity to produce 'further speculation about sex', its investigatory impulses understandably extend well beyond the libidinal circuit where 'money shots' and 'meat shots' are routinely displayed for male heterosexual consumption. In its restless pursuit of sexual knowledge, pornography reaches out towards many other bodily zones and somatic pleasures. Some pornographic films, Williams emphasizes, are not compulsively drawn to the genitals. Films featuring SM, for example, focus more on structures of domination and submission than genital pleasure. In depicting active and passive erotic role-playing, SM pornography frequently represents a 'performance of perverse desires which do not follow the expected routes of sexual identity (hetero or homo) or gender (male or female) that keeps the viewer and protagonists guessing about desires and pleasures that take surprising twists and turns' (Williams 1992: 250–51). Such films, argues Williams, clearly require a comprehensive analysis that shows exactly why pornography enables sexual fantasy to fluctuate between a range of identificatory positions. She states that Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis' well-known essay, 'Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality' (1986 [1964]), provides a useful paradigm for thinking about how all phantasmatic projections involve rapid movements between the subject and object, between the self and other. 'Fantasy', argue Laplanche and Pontalis, 'is not the object of desire, but its setting. In fantasy the subject does not pursue the object or its signs: he appears caught up in the sequences of images' (Laplanche and Pontalis 1986: 26). In other words, this psychoanalytic model suggests that in fantasy the subject may, as it were, experience the pleasures of being 'desubjectivized'.

Since the huge market for pornography widens well beyond the heterosexual 'stag film', Williams suggests that erotic representations such as 'bi' and 'sadie-max' (SM) pornography open up innovative possibilities for people of many different sexualities to enjoy desires not forever beholden to the phallus. Although she

states that it might be rather utopian to believe that pornography will necessarily serve as an instrument of sexual liberation, it remains the case that a company led by women, such as Femme Productions, was established '[b]ecause heterosexual women wanted better sexual fantasies' than the ones previously available in the 'males-only' genre (Williams 1992: 283). In putting forward these arguments, Williams is clearly building on advances made in film theory set within a psychoanalytic framework. By employing some of Freud's and Lacan's leading concepts, Williams maintains that the field of pornographic representation remains full of identificatory conflicts, preventing the straight male viewer from adopting a singular perspective on the imaginary spectacle set before him.

But in explaining the visually frenzied condition of sexual fantasy, Williams also alludes to a body of theoretical inquiry that would contest many of the assumptions made by psychoanalytic criticism. Her powerful idea that pornography strives to produce ever-increasing amounts of knowledge to discover the 'truth' of sex owes much to the work of Michel Foucault. Repeatedly, Foucault argues that Freudian paradigms merely describe and thereby perpetuate the sexual desires they seek to understand. Hardly convinced that psychoanalysis is a radical critical method, Foucault urges us to demystify the categories – such as the Oedipus and castration complexes – through which we have come to comprehend desire. If we do so, he argues, we can at last break free from the despotic 'agency of sex' (Foucault 1977c: 157). Rather than accept that sexuality is in any way based on the conflicted libidinal forces, Foucault asks why the West has associated sexual desire with the system of (de)generating pleasures I have been tracing here, all the way from John Donne to contemporary feminism. In his far-reaching work, Foucault invites us to think hard about the ways in which 'sex', 'sexuality' and 'pornography' emerged in the first place, about the interests they have served, and about the kinds of power they continue to relay. As we will see in the next chapter, Foucault demands that we look critically at the discursive operations that continue to shape and mould contemporary perceptions of sexuality as a site of repression and liberation.

4

DISCURSIVE DESIRES

FOUCAULT'S BODIES

Ever since its original publication in France as *La volonté de savoir* (*The Will to Knowledge*), the introductory volume to *The History of Sexuality* (1977c [1976]) by Michel Foucault has been a source of highly contentious debate. This remarkable book contests established theoretical orthodoxies about social control and repression developed by widely differing schools of Marxist and psychoanalytic thought. Little wonder, then, that Foucault's writing remains troubling to many intellectuals, since he refuses either to employ the dialectical materialism of Marx or to affirm the psychological realities elaborated by Freud. Neither class struggle nor the unconscious has a fundamental role to play in Foucault's assiduous critique of eroticism in the West. It is his goal to reveal how analyses of the class struggle and the unconscious, dear to Marxism and Freudianism respectively, are enmeshed in the very systems of power they seek to explain. In Foucault's work, therefore, the term sexuality provides the focus for indicating why Marx and Freud fail to see the ways in which their respective works re-impose the cultural laws they are striving to analyse.

Not surprisingly, Foucault has made a great many intellectual enemies. Yet even his harshest critics would hardly deny that his pathbreaking inquiry into the emergence and mobilization of the nineteenth-century term sexuality has completely transformed how we might think about the meaning of desire. It is fair to claim that Foucault, who completed three volumes of *The History of Sexuality* before his untimely death in 1984, was the first modern intellectual to present a critical paradigm that broke decisively with the sexological and subsequent psychoanalytic models that assumed dominance in both academic and popular cultures. Few disciplines have remained untouched by his inventive reflections on sexuality, and the ideas concisely sketched in his fascinating introductory volume have prompted productive exchanges between theorists working in fields as diverse as literary studies and political science. For it is in his introduction to *The History of Sexuality* that Foucault's arguments ask us to contemplate, not only why sexuality became such a focus of concern in the past hundred years, but also how sexuality concentrated extremely potent transfers of power that have exerted considerable influence on the regulation of the social order.

By emphasizing issues of power in his introduction to *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault extends his longstanding concern with the means through which institutions produce strategic methods of control to induce docility in the social body. Among his distinguished earlier writings is *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* (1963), a study that examines how the medical gaze exerts specific forms of power over the human body. More than twenty years later, Foucault pursued this line of thinking in relation to the incarcerating designs of social institutions. Throughout *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1977a [1975]), he asks us to consider how 'prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons' (Foucault 1977a: 228). In its use of a theoretical vocabulary already brought into sharp focus in his methodological study, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972 [1971]), Foucault's *History of Sexuality* explains for the first time how power circulates within the social order through discourse. By employing such terms as

discourse, discursive formation and discursive regime, Foucault is alluding to historically variable ways of speaking, talking and writing that function systematically – if, at times, contradictorily – to articulate what is desirable and undesirable, legitimate and illegitimate, within a culture.

In order to show the distinguishing features of Foucault's leading claims about the expressly discursive condition of desire, this chapter explores the principal arguments he makes against Marxism and psychoanalysis in his introduction to *The History of Sexuality*. Since Foucault's fascination with the links between discourse, knowledge and power has scarcely passed without serious criticism, the central section of the present discussion surveys several Marxist, feminist and post-colonial objections to his highly disputed model of domination, subordination and resistance. But even if Foucault's writing remains polemical because of its supposed failure to ground his analysis in traditional categories of class, gender and race, his writings have none the less powerfully shaped the critical work of contemporary sex radicals who have traced the institutional strategies, discursive formations and structures of power/knowledge that maintain the dominance of heterosexuality. If *The History of Sexuality* has been instrumental in shaping any field of inquiry, then its presence is assuredly most visible in queer theory, a field of study that has flourished since the early 1990s, and which takes Foucault's lead in resisting the naturalizing assumptions that undergird normative sexual behaviours. As Lynne Huffer rightly remarks, 'without Foucault's *Sexuality One* [his introductory volume] queer theory as we know it would not have developed' (Huffer 2009: 33). There is no doubt that Foucault's significance for queer theory lies in the particular emphasis he puts on the discursive construction of eroticism, especially how and why desire has been damagingly constrained by the ways in which we have come to talk and think about a late nineteenth-century word, sexuality, particularly in its limited dualistic 'homo-' and 'hetero-' forms.

So how might we begin to approach Foucault's innovative model of sexuality? A handful of selected passages in *The History of Sexuality* clarify his leading claims. Roughly two-thirds of the

way through his succinct introductory study, Foucault explicitly states his view of sexuality:

Sexuality must not be described as a stubborn drive, by nature alien and of necessity disobedient to a power which exhausts itself trying to subdue it and often fails to control it entirely. It appears rather as an especially dense transfer point for relations of power: between men and women, young people and old people, parents and offspring, teachers and students, priests and laity, an administration and a population. Sexuality is not the most intractable element in power relations, but rather one of those endowed with the greatest instrumentality: useful for the greatest number of manoeuvres and capable of serving as a point of support, as a linchpin, for the most varied strategies.

There is no single, all-encompassing strategy, valid for all of society and uniformly bearing on all the manifestations of sex. For example, the idea that there have been repeated attempts, by various means, to reduce all of sex to its reproductive function, its heterosexual and adult form, and its matrimonial legitimacy fails to take into account the manifold objectives aimed for, the manifold means employed in the different sexual politics concerned with the two sexes, the different age groups and social classes.

(Foucault 1977c: 103)

Rather than assume, as sexology and psychoanalysis do, that sexuality is a surging hydraulic force that Western culture struggles to repress, Foucault exposes what this particular belief about eroticism tells us of the ways power is distributed, mediated and produced within modern culture. That is why Foucault wishes to situate sexuality as a concept that serves as a 'dense transfer point for relations of power'.

Foucault therefore demonstrates how and why eroticism is bound into structures of inequality. But lest we think these relations of power involve a static disparity between those who rule and those who are subordinated in an assortment of institutional settings, Foucault is quick to add that beliefs about sexuality do not necessarily produce decisive and unchangeable inequalities between groups of individuals. He states it is inadvisable to

attribute the dominance of a sexual institution such as heterosexual marriage to one all-determining source, such as the belief that opposite-sex relations gained hegemony in Western society simply because of a cultural imperative to reproduce. There are, as Foucault insists, adjacent reasons for the privilege accorded to this organized form of sexuality, reasons that point to the cultural management of differences between men and women, between generations and between classes. Foucault's point becomes clear if we trace the transformation of the family from the Renaissance to the present. The history of the Western family reveals that contemporary ideals of the companionate marriage based on romantic love began in the eighteenth century to supersede earlier familial models that placed greater stress on extensive ties of kinship and economic exchange. Any discussion of heterosexual marriage consequently entails a wide variety of considerations about where relations of power reside, depending on the epoch in which such relations emerge. Viewed through this interpretative lens, the concept of sexuality crystallizes the idea that there are indeed precise – if historically contingent – divisions that separate the sexes, generations and classes from one another. But given the complex manner in which these differentials of power may intersect only to contradict one another, the relations in question remain in a dynamic and active condition. Hence Foucault argues that critical inquiries into sexuality must be sensitive to the non-uniformity between miscellaneous types of privilege and deprivation. Class, generation, race and sex – just to give some of the main categories for mapping understandings of sexuality – are factors that can complicate our knowledge of how power is distributed in the West. Therefore it becomes possible to grasp exceptionally complex reconfigurations of dominance and subordination when we explore the interfaces between these multiple coordinates of power. Such a model, he claims, has a distinct advantage over one that appeals to the vertical binary of an inert, 'top-down' hierarchy neatly split between mastery and subordination.

Foucault elaborates this analysis to bear out his basic premise: that sex, far from having been silenced from the Middle Ages onwards through Christian imperatives to purge sinful fleshiness,

has been the subject of an overwhelming explosion of discourse. Much as we might like to believe that a prudish Victorian culture did everything it could to silence sexuality (from devising techniques to prohibit masturbation in women and children to putting draperies to hide the sexual suggestiveness of piano legs), Foucault shatters the illusion that this wholehearted effort aimed to repress volatile desires. Instead, he claims that sexuality was in that period the subject of an immense verbosity, so that the desire to silence sex itself paradoxically became an almost unstoppable discourse. By focusing on this intriguing contradiction, Foucault states that the desire to speak about the repressed nature of sex participates in the very structure it is seeking to decipher. Here is how he elucidates what he calls this 'incitement to discourse':

Rather than the uniform concern to hide sex, rather than a general prudishness of language, what distinguishes these last three centuries is the variety, the wide dispersion of devices that were invented for speaking about it, for having it be spoken about, for inducing it to speak of itself, for listening, recording, transcribing, and redistributing what is said about it: around sex, a whole network of varying, specific, and coercive transpositions into discourse. Rather than a massive censorship, beginning with the verbal properties imposed by the Age of Reason, what was involved was a regulated and polymorphous incitement to discourse.

(Foucault 1977c: 34)

These comments pinpoint an acute tension in the manner in which sex has been discussed in the West for the past 150 years. The more modern Western culture devised methods for speaking about the unspeakable nature of sex, the more sex itself became a type of open secret, ushering into the public domain a scandal that had to be masked. Such a view shows that censorship may in some respects achieve the reverse of its aims. Not only does censorship condemn sexuality to silence, it must also articulate precisely what it subjugates to the rule of law. This is one of the ruses affecting many legal pronouncements that are obliged to give voice to locutions considered unlawful. Take, for instance, how in the United States members of the military can still lose

their jobs for uttering the words 'I am homosexual'. (This is commonly known as the 'Don't ask, don't tell' principle that insists that lesbians and gay men remain closeted. At the time of writing, politicians are challenging the wisdom of this law, which is abbreviated at DADT.) In censuring this disclosure, this law must paradoxically articulate the words 'I am homosexual' in order to denounce them. On this model, sexuality becomes the site on which contradictory transfers of power occur, whereby the court that holds the power of the law must, at least in theory, commit the crime it condemns. It should be clear, then, that Foucault has no patience at all with what he names the 'repressive hypothesis'. How could a society be sexually repressed when there has been such an 'incitement to discourse' on this very belief?

In support of this overarching argument, Foucault examines four nineteenth-century phenomena that fix attention on how the exercise of power operates through complex discourses surrounding sexuality. In discussing these examples, he claims we see clear manifestations of an 'era of "biopower"', an era when there was 'an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations' (Foucault 1977c: 140). First, he observes how the 'feminine body was analyzed – qualified and disqualified – as being thoroughly saturated with sexuality' – a point that has already become apparent to us through the discussion of several late-Victorian sexological tracts in Chapter 1. This 'hysterization of women's bodies' served multiple but related functions: the maintenance of an 'organic communication' with the social body, with the family and with children. To sustain each respective sphere, women's bodies were placed under careful scrutiny, ensuring their reproductive capacity, fitness as wives and healthiness as mothers. Second, Foucault recognizes how transfers of power were especially active in what he calls the 'pedagogization of children's sex': that is, placing the child's body under surveillance to create the contradictory knowledge that, even though it was the case that children would masturbate as a matter of course, such behaviour was at the same time deemed contrary to nature, and thus had to be stopped. Not only parents and families intervened on this subject to educate the child's desires, but also doctors, psychologists and teachers

developed disapproving views on the topic. Children's sexuality, therefore, presented itself as a threat that had to be contained.

Third, a 'socialization of procreative behaviour' came into operation to ensure that heterosexual intercourse was increasingly bound to discourses espousing moral responsibility: following the lead of the theorist of population control, Thomas Malthus (1766–1834), society increasingly encouraged parents to produce children in appropriate circumstances. This Malthusian logic persisted into the twentieth century as married couples came under growing pressure to employ various types of birth control (condoms, the oestrogen pill, spermicides and vasectomy, among many others).

Last, Foucault identifies a 'psychiatrization of perverse pleasure', whereby sexual instinct was granted an autonomous status, leading to research that sought to separate its healthy manifestations from distinctly pathological ones. On this basis, then, 'the hysterical woman, the masturbating child, the Malthusian couple, and the perverse adult' serve as the prominent formations where sexuality emerges as a technique of control in the nineteenth century (Foucault 1977c: 104–5).

Read in isolation from the rest of his study, Foucault's enumeration of these four figures of sexuality may imply exactly the kind of functionalism that his theory of power wishes to debunk. It is not unfair to claim that his emphasis on how each sexual type was used as an instrument of state control and institutional manipulation could all too readily suggest that these bodies were completely in thrall to the law that kept them under close observation. In order to ensure that his work does not succumb to this mistaken criticism, Foucault devotes a great part of his inquiry to explaining why the forms of power he is analysing are certainly not founded on a top-down model of subjection where law – either in cultural or statist forms – always succeeds in imposing authority from above. Instead, he insists that power is a distinctly productive relation, one that creates resistance in the same moment as it exerts force:

Power comes from below; that is, there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled at the root of power relations,

and serving as a general matrix – no such duality extending from the top down and reacting on more and more limited groups to the very depths of the social body. One must suppose rather that the manifold relationships of force that take shape and come into play in the machinery of production, in families, limited groups, and institutions, are the basis for wide-ranging effects of cleavage that run through the social body as a whole.

(Foucault 1977c: 94)

This passage makes one point clear. If we believed that power manages to contain its subjects on a purely top-down basis, we would have a remarkably monolithic understanding of how certain ideological forces gained ascendancy and succeeded in subduing opposing forces.

Instead, Foucault argues for a nuanced comprehension of how contradictions fracture oppressors and oppressed, not in an us-versus-them dialectic, but in their 'strictly relational character'. In his view, the existence of power relations depends on 'a multiplicity of points of resistance':

[T]hese play the role of adversary, target, support, or handle in power relations. These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network. Hence there is no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary. Instead there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case: resistances that are possible, necessary, improbable; others that are spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, or violent; still others that are quick to compromise, interested, or sacrificial; by definition, they can only exist in the strategic field of power relations. But this does not mean that they are only a reaction or rebound, forming with respect to the basic domination an underside that is in the end always passive, doomed to perpetual defeat.

(Foucault 1977c: 96)

In detailing this structure, Foucault implicitly condemns earlier political models that pitted the slave against the master (as in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* [1807]), and the proletariat against the capitalists (as in the *Communist Manifesto* [1848] by Friedrich

Engels [1820–95] and Marx). From his perspective, Hegel's and Marx's binarized methods for examining power can only fail to comprehend the complexity of a phenomenon such as sexuality.

How, then, might we grasp the intricate 'relational character of power relationships' in the context of sexuality? One of the most famous examples from the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* should make Foucault's distinctive perspective on power clear. In the chapter titled 'The Deployment of Sexuality', Foucault identifies several 'rules' or 'cautionary prescriptions' alerting us to how sexuality has served as a locus for the exercise of power. One of these 'rules' refers to the 'tactical polyvalence of discourses'. This heading points to the ways in which 'discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy'. In order to illustrate how power can operate in polyvalent – and consequently paradoxical – ways, Foucault turns to the classification, stigmatization and surveillance of sexual perversions in the late-nineteenth century:

There is no question that the appearance in nineteenth-century psychiatry, jurisprudence, and literature of a whole series of discourses on the species and subspecies of homosexuality, inversion, pederasty, and 'psychic hermaphroditism' made possible a strong advance of social controls into this area of 'perversity'; but it also made possible the formation of a 'reverse' discourse: homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or 'naturalness' be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified.

(Foucault 1977c: 101)

Here Foucault claims that no sooner had a dominant pathologizing discourse sought to disqualify homosexuality than a resistant discourse of sexual liberation declared that same-sex desire was a completely natural condition. The very discourse that sought to produce a regulative order managed to empower those it sought to subjugate. In other words, sexological categories could cut either way, depending on who was deploying them. On the one hand, the term 'homosexual' could be used as a clinical definition,

thus making men and women who desired their own sex into subjects of disease. On the other hand, 'homosexuality' could be professed as an entirely healthy congenital condition, thus giving a sexual minority a platform on which to develop concerted campaigns for emancipation.

But historical evidence reveals that there is a significant problem with Foucault's model of 'reverse' discourse. He incorrectly implies that homosexuals were espousing themselves to an identity first devised by doctors, psychiatrists and social scientists to deleterious ends. For homosexual liberationists were pioneers in theorizing same-sex desire. As Chapter 1 points out, the sex radical Karl Heinrich Ulrichs never used the term homosexuality (see pp. 19–23). Instead, he established the idea that 'man–manly love' was a wholly natural form of inversion, whereby a female soul inhabited a male body. Similarly, the person who conjured the word homosexuality itself, Karl-Maria Benkert (later known as Karl-Maria Kertbeny) (1824–82), was a Hungarian sex radical who maintained a correspondence with Ulrichs. Benkert's earliest use of the word homosexual has been traced to 1869. Such information clearly indicates that it was the sexologists, not the emancipationists, who engaged in a 'reverse' discourse. Krafft-Ebing was among the first to appropriate 'homosexuality' as a term from campaigners seeking to liberate same-sex desire, and thus this category was promptly put into a clinical frame of reference. Yet it must be added that such details do not necessarily invalidate Foucault's general point that power can be refracted through discourse, showing how it is not always burdened by a repressive sovereign law. Instead, power remains in a complex 'polyvalent' condition, as the concept of 'reverse' discourse demonstrates.

If Foucault's 'relational' and thus 'polyvalent' concept of power contests Marxist views of the binary nature of class struggle, his attack on the belief that power involves submission to a sovereign law is directly angled at psychoanalysis. In his view, a huge theoretical effort was made in the past two hundred years to associate sexuality with an unbending rule of law that sought to put it under severe scrutiny, and psychoanalysis merely confirmed this trend. Yet he argues that, to understand the affiliation between law, psychoanalysis and sexuality, we require a much broader

appreciation of how Western culture was striving to preserve the social order. At one point, Foucault claims that the subjection of sexuality coincided with the late-nineteenth-century scientific discourse of eugenics that spawned racial ideologies, ones that would culminate most terrifyingly in fascism. He argues that sexuality and racism were intertwined. Although this connection between sexuality and racism may at first sound abstruse, there is, he believes, a significant link between the two. The connection is made through the resonant word blood, a word that reveals how the middle classes were compelled to establish their political power on two fronts. First, the bourgeoisie absorbed and transformed the established aristocratic model of patrilineage by 'determining good marriages', 'inducing the desired fertilities' and 'ensuring the health and longevity of children', thus strengthening their ties of blood. Second, the bourgeoisie increasingly respected the 'mythical concern with protecting the purity of the blood and ensuring the triumph of the race' (Foucault 1977c: 148–49). The link between these two formations can be best understood if we consider how both incest and racial miscegenation were issues of enduring concern during this period. These two practices were systematically outlawed to uphold sexual purity and respectability, thereby maintaining class and racial power.

If we bear in mind the resonant meanings of 'blood', then it becomes easier to comprehend Foucault's searching critique of psychoanalysis. As Chapter 2 shows, Freud's investigation into the psyche to a large degree broke with the pathologizing tendencies of sexological research. But, in Foucault's view, Freud's inquiries into sexual maturation make perpetual appeals to the cultural laws that regulate the erotic identifications unconsciously achieved by individual subjects. Foucault stresses how the whole apparatus of the Freudian Oedipus and castration complexes (see pp. 60–73), no matter how critical of earlier theories of sexual perversion and degeneration, assimilate prevailing assumptions about the indissociable link between sexuality and cultural prohibition:

It is to the political credit of psychoanalysis – or at least, of what was most coherent in it – that it regarded with suspicion (and this from

its inception, that is, from the moment it broke away from the neuropsychiatry of degenerescence) the irrevocably proliferating aspects which might be contained in these power mechanisms, aimed at controlling and administering the everyday life of sexuality; whence the Freudian endeavour (out of reaction no doubt to the great surge of racism that was contemporary with it) to ground sexuality in the law – the law of alliance, tabooed consanguinity and the Sovereign-Father, in short, to surround desire with all the trappings of the old order of power. It was owing to this that psychoanalysis was – in the main, with a few exceptions – in theoretical and practical opposition to fascism. But this position of psychoanalysis was tied to a specific historical conjuncture.

(Foucault 1977c: 150)

As Foucault says, Freud repudiated the late nineteenth-century belief that sexuality could be understood in terms of preserving the blood of the race through eugenic efforts to purify and strengthen offspring. Yet here Foucault claims that, in contesting such racialized thought, Freud none the less advanced the view that sexuality was subject to cultural prohibitions that governed an extremely complicated field of erotic identifications between parents and children. In other words, no matter how much psychoanalysis wanted to separate sexuality from a set of laws that upheld the survival of the bourgeoisie's racialized blood, Freud nevertheless elaborated a system of complexes that determined specific erotic identifications which kept sexuality within an abstract framework of prohibition. To Foucault, this particular characteristic of psychoanalytic thought paradoxically binds it to precisely the logic championed by the racist movement to which Freudian thinking was concertedly opposed: namely fascism, which built its horrific politics on the preservation of Aryan purity. Foucault's observation certainly aims to show how deeply Western culture was saturated by the belief that sexuality was defined against a series of injunctions that did their utmost to regulate desire. But the drastic counter-intuitive logic of Foucault's claim may well say more about his own resistance to psychoanalytic laws than it does about Freud's concerted efforts to comprehend group psychology under coercive regimes (see Freud,

Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego, Standard Edition (1953–65 XVIII: 67–143).

Yet it is not just the manner in which psychoanalysis keeps sexuality trapped in a system of subjugating laws that concerns Foucault. He argues that Freud's research into the unconscious simultaneously extends a parallel regulatory model that, since the time of the Middle Ages, has been in place to comprehend human sexuality. The regulatory model in question is the religious confession instituted by the Roman Catholic Church. Just as it had sought to interpret the repressed condition of sexuality through the governing mechanisms of cultural law, psychoanalysis exploited the form of the case history already used for some time by sexologists. From Foucault's perspective, the case history is simply a modern version of the religious confession that reveals the truth of sinful transgressions. In his view, psychoanalysis builds on the established structure of confession to accentuate how sexual activity is a repressed phenomenon that must be brought into the liberating light of open inquiry. As Foucault declares, in Freud's work 'the great requirement of confession that had taken form so long ago assumed the new meaning of an injunction to lift psychical repression' (Foucault 1977c: 130). No one, he suggests, could overestimate the powerful grip that the 'repressive hypothesis' upon which psychoanalysis was based would have on twentieth-century thought. Foucault mentions the notable consequence Freud's research had on the work of the left-wing social theorist Wilhelm Reich (1897–1957). In studies such as *The Invasion of Compulsory Sex-Morality* (1971 [1931]) and *The Sexual Revolution: Towards a Self-Regulating Character Structure* (1945), Reich claimed that society could only be revolutionized if we committed ourselves to a wholehearted anti-repressive struggle that emancipated sexual desire. 'If', writes Reich in 1931, 'there is a lack of social possibilities for genital gratification and sublimation, if the psychic apparatus has been distorted by educational influences to such an extent that it cannot make use of existing possibilities', then the 'results are neuroses, perversions, pathological changes of character, antisocial manifestations of genital life, and, not least, work disturbances' (Reich 1971: 154). From Foucault's standpoint, such a theory

represented only 'a tactical shift and reversal in the great deployment of sexuality', indicating how Reich's writings were mired in a well-established myth that inextricably linked eroticism with cultural prohibition.

Similar assertions appear in the subsequent two volumes of *The History of Sexuality*, both of which were published in France in 1984. These later volumes, however, lead back to a period well before the emergence of sexology. *The Use of Pleasure* (Volume 2) and *The Care of the Self* (Volume 3) examine the organization of eroticism in antiquity, hundreds of years before the West had granted a name to sexuality. These works bear out a number of illuminating points that form part of Foucault's larger political project to dismantle the hazardous assumptions underpinning modern conceptions of sexuality. Foucault indicates how the modern 'deployment of sexuality' cannot explain the erotic lives of the Greeks and Greco-Romans. Foucault accentuates several ideas about the classical 'use of pleasure' and 'care of the self' that are highly instructive for an analysis of desire in modern Western culture. Both of these classical precepts, he believes, challenge the legalistic prohibitions that throughout the twentieth century have regulated sexuality. If we take a small selection of key passages from these two volumes, together with statements Foucault made in contemporaneous interviews, it becomes possible to see more clearly why his analysis of classical cultures formed part of an ambitious venture to disjoin the modern association of sexuality with systematic interdictions.

In *The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault devotes the larger part of his discussion to the ethical issues raised by sexual relations between male citizens and boys, women and slaves in ancient Greece. Although the free adult male had the right to penetrate anyone belonging to an inferior group, he had to attend scrupulously to a healthy erotic life in the name of ethically strengthening his self. This concept of ethical strength, however, should not be confused with the narrow modern conception of health as the elimination and prevention of disease. Foucault points out that in classical Greece erotic conduct was organized in terms that demanded the painstaking and thereby healthy exercise of power by the free adult male. A male citizen maintained both his self-respect and

his social power by deliberating over his right to penetrate anyone of lesser standing. He was also obliged not to allow himself to be penetrated. Although the free adult males had special sexual prerogatives, there were perceived dangers if they engaged too frequently in sex. Foucault explains why:

The moral reflection of the Greeks on sexual behaviour did not seek to justify interdictions, but to stylize a freedom – that freedom which the ‘free’ man exercised in his activity. This produced a state of affairs that might well seem paradoxical at first glance: the Greeks practised, accepted, and valued relations between men and boys; and yet their philosophers dealt with the subject by conceiving and elaborating an ethics of abstention. They were quite willing to grant that a married man might go in search of sexual pleasures outside of marriage, and yet their moralists conceived the principle of a matrimonial life in which the husband would have relations only with his own wife. They never imagined that sexual pleasure was in itself an evil or that it could be counted among the natural stigmata of a transgression; and yet their doctors worried over the relationship between sexual activity and health, and they developed an entire theory concerning the dangers of sexual practice.

(Foucault 1985: 97)

Foucault emphasizes that the ancient Greeks did not make cardinal distinctions between ‘normal behaviour’ and ‘abnormal and pathological practices’, although valuations between what constituted good and bad erotic conduct were undoubtedly at stake. Instead, this society focused on the ‘use of pleasures ... in terms of a certain way of caring for one’s body’, and its free men were advised to follow a ‘regimen aimed at regulating an activity that was recognized as being important for health’ (Foucault 1985: 97–98).

In his analysis, Foucault observes the emphasis placed by the ancient Greeks on the stylization of erotic conduct. At no point, he claims, did this classical society stress that repression was the healthy result of abstention. Rather, the most elevated forms of self-respect were embodied in male citizens who knew how to master their desires. This self-mastery constituted an ethical attentiveness towards the self, a point of exceptional significance

to a figure who already wielded mighty power over his children, his slaves and his wife. As Foucault observes, this mode of ethical conduct put no uncertain pressure on the free man to become 'stronger than himself':

We have seen how sexual behaviour was constituted, in Greek thought, as a domain of ethical practice in the form of the *aphrodisia*, of pleasurable acts situated in an agonistic field of forces difficult to control. In order to take the form of a conduct that was rationally and morally admissible, these acts required a strategy aimed at an exact self-mastery – as its culmination and consummation – whereby the subject would be 'stronger than himself' even in the power that he exercised over others. Now, the requirement of austerity that was implied by the constitution of the self-disciplined subject was not presented as a universal law, which each and every individual would have to obey, but rather as a principle of stylization of conduct for those who wished to give their existence the most graceful and accomplished form possible.

(Foucault 1985: 250–51)

In *The Care of the Self*, Foucault reiterates many of these principal points, underscoring how in the Greco–Roman world 'the cultivation of the self produced its effect not in the strengthening of that which can thwart desire, but in certain modifications relating to the formative elements of ethical subjectivity' (Foucault 1986: 67). There is no doubt that he gives his seal of approval to classical models of *askesis*: an ancient Greek word signifying a form of self-questioning that requires the male citizen to reflect on his sexual weaknesses, strengths and potentialities. Especially attractive to Foucault is how this model of 'ethical subjectivity' presents the possibility to enjoy types of sexual pleasure not dominated by an exterior law. *Askesis* therefore should not be confused with its more recent derivation, asceticism. In Christian terms, asceticism implies a self-castigating form of renunciation. By comparison, Foucault contends that in Greco–Roman civilization the self-regulation of desires constitutes a liberating autonomy, for such *askesis* creates a realm of freedom over which the male citizen at last maintains control.

Such practices of freedom were often on Foucault's mind during the last ten years of his life, particularly when he turned his attention towards homosexual minorities who were inventing their own communities of pleasure in the face of considerable hostility. In several of the many interviews Foucault granted in the 1980s, he focuses on how the gay male subcultures of New York City and San Francisco provided models for understanding how it is possible to resist the cultural laws that endeavour to prohibit dissident sexual relationships. 'I think', he remarked in 1982, 'what most bothers those who are not gay about gayness is the gay lifestyle, not sex acts themselves'. Since he believes gay subcultures allow men to interact erotically in ways that do not mimic heterosexual monogamy, Foucault observes that it 'is the prospect that gays will create as yet unforeseen kinds of relations that many people cannot tolerate' (Foucault 1989: 332). Among such 'unforeseen' relationships would be casual sex in the public sphere and engaging in sado-masochism (SM). It is when Foucault elaborates his thoughts on the latter sexual practice that one begins to understand why he thinks genuine forms of sexual freedom might come into being. In an interview first published in the US lesbian and gay journal, *The Advocate*, Foucault's questioner raises the following point about forms of experimental sex dedicated to innovative pleasures. 'Can we be sure that these new pleasures won't be exploited in the way advertising uses the stimulation of pleasure as a means of social control?' The interviewer wants to know if there can be 'unforeseen' sexual relationships that are not bound to the regulative mechanisms enacted by cultural prohibitions. Here is Foucault's reply:

We can never be sure. In fact, we can always be sure it will happen, and that everything that has been created or acquired, any ground that has been gained will, at a certain moment be used in such a way. That's the way we live, that's the way we struggle, that's the way of human history. ... But you are quite right in underlining that we always have to be quite careful and to be aware of the fact that we have to move on to something else, that we have other needs as well. The SM ghetto in San Francisco is a good example of a community that has experimented with, and formed an identity around, pleasure.

(Foucault 1989: 385)

In the same interview, Foucault remarks that SM is 'a process of invention' that involves an 'acting out of power structures by a strategic game that is able to give sexual pleasure or bodily pleasure' (Foucault 1989: 388). Although many critics of SM would claim that the staging of sexual scenes featuring 'masters' and 'slaves' simply duplicates the most bleakly unequal power structures experienced in the everyday world, Foucault argues to the contrary that SM turns those binary power differences against themselves by allowing participants in this 'strategic game' to take control of the erotic charge factored into domination and subordination. Since this is a 'game' with agreed rules, the 'slave' is not *really* a slave or the 'master' not *really* a master. In such situations, the masochist or 'bottom' is often thought to command more power than the sadist or 'top' precisely because the 'bottom' controls the moment when the punishments have to stop. Apologists for SM insist that expressly consensual sexual practices of this kind involve complex exchanges of erotic power that may well be unintelligible to outsiders. The not uncommon animosity towards SM points up a distinctly Foucauldian irony. For is not the state taking pleasure in punishing a sexual practice that explores precisely those punishments whose eroticism is ever-present but perpetually denied in everyday life? It is this kind of question that Foucault's transformative research into sexuality certainly provokes. But, like all major theorists, Foucault's work has been the subject of extensive debate because of what it neglects, if not systematically excludes. Even if he praises the 'unforeseen' dimensions to sexual pleasure, there are several highly visible features to the power relayed by eroticism that he ignores. So at this point it is time to examine some of the striking lacunae in his otherwise innovative analyses of sexuality.

FOUCAULT'S EXCLUSIONS

Throughout my overview of *The History of Sexuality*, readers have no doubt already inferred there are many angles from which Foucault's pathbreaking approach to eroticism might come under attack. Among the first critics to seize on weaknesses in his

introductory volume were feminists who deplored his marked insensitivity to issues of gender and sexual difference. In an essay published in 1988, Sandra Lee Bartky put a forceful case against Foucault's unstinting sexism, while at the same time recognizing the considerable achievements made by his highly original inquiries into the cultural exercise of power already evident in his earlier study, *Discipline and Punish*:

Foucault's account in *Discipline and Punish* of the disciplinary practices that produce the 'docile bodies' of modernity is a genuine *tour de force*, incorporating a rich theoretical account of the ways in which instrumental reason takes hold of the body with a mass of historical detail. But Foucault treats the body throughout as if it were one, as if the bodily experiences of men and women did not differ and as if men and women bore the same relationship to the characteristic institutions of modern life. Where is the account of the disciplinary practices that engender the 'docile bodies' of women, bodies more docile than the bodies of men? Women, like men, are subject to many of the same disciplinary practices Foucault describes. But he is blind to those disciplines that produce a modality of embodiment that is particularly feminine. To overlook the forms of subjection that engender the feminine body is to perpetuate the silence and powerlessness of those upon whom the disciplines have been imposed. Hence, even though a liberatory note is sounded in Foucault's critique of power, his analysis as a whole reproduces that sexism which is endemic throughout Western political theory.

(Bartky 1988: 63–64)

It was very probably because of Foucault's obstinate defiance of psychoanalysis that his work refused to attach much significance to the anatomical distinction between the sexes, a distinction fundamental to the sexual laws governing Freud's Oedipus and castration complexes. Instead, Foucault writes of both physicality and sexuality in such a generalized manner that on occasions he makes it almost impossible to see the structural inequalities the West has persistently created between men and women. Given his unobservant attitude to how power differentially affects male and female bodies, it is not surprising that *The History of Sexuality*

pays little or no attention to gender, the cultural construction of masculinity and femininity.

This point becomes especially noticeable when one examines Foucault's assessment of male love in classical times. Commenting on the male-centeredness of Volumes 2 and 3 of *The History of Sexuality*, Kate Soper teases out an irony on which Foucault cares not to reflect. Soper argues that the sexual ethics that Foucault strongly admires in both ancient Greek and Greco-Roman civilization depends on forms of domination:

Foucault has been justly charged with offering an account of power which not only ignores those highly specific forms in which it is exercised in any sexually hierarchical society, but also overlooks the differential impact on the lives of men and women of the general 'disciplining' procedures to which he does attend. In this sense, it can be said that he retains at the very heart of his critique of the liberal-humanist and Marxist accounts of power some of the same universalizing and gender-blind approach to humanity which, for feminism, is a central failing of these theories. Foucault, in other words, might be said to be somewhat implicitly reliant on a masculinist conception of the subject as the support for his polemic with humanism.

There is also something markedly androcentric in the quality of the attention Foucault brings to his study of the Greek and Greco-Roman sexual ethics in his history of sexuality. It is important, however, to be clear about the nature of this charge. Clearly Foucault does immerse us in the mores of highly patriarchal and patrician societies from which women were *a priori* excluded as significant ethical subjects; his genealogy of ethics is thus very much concerned with the desire and comportment of an elite of male citizens. But in a very real sense, this historian (or genealogist) of ideas has no option but to reflect the social pre-eminence of this group since it was largely responsible for the dominant culture.

(Soper 1993: 39)

In her assessment of *The History of Sexuality*, Soper stresses that Foucault's discussion of the 'care of the self' is strangely unaware of how the male citizen's ethical development might involve interaction with women, notably the wives whose voices remain

surprisingly muted throughout these volumes. As a consequence, Foucault 'defines the ethical so as to make it appear a very private – and masculine – affair: a matter primarily of self-mastery and authorial self-creation' (Soper 1993: 41). On this view, Foucault's analysis may well appear complicit with the structure of sexual dominance he investigates in classical cultures.

But, as Soper observes, this is not the only place where sexism erupts in *The History of Sexuality*. Foucault's thoughtlessness towards sexual difference makes itself plain when he recounts an event that took place in the French village of Lapcourt in 1867. He relates the story of how a simple-minded farm-hand played a game called 'curdled milk' with a little girl. This episode aims to show how 'discourse aimed at sex' magnified 'people's awareness of it as a constant danger':

At the border of a field, he had obtained a few caresses from a little girl, just as he had done before and seen done by the village urchins round about him; for, at the edge of the wood, or in the ditch by the road leading to Saint-Nicholas, they would play the familiar game called 'curdled milk'. So he was pointed out by the girl's parents to the mayor of the village, led by the gendarmes to the judges, who indicted him and turned him over first to a doctor, then to two other experts who not only wrote their report but also had it published. What is the significant thing about this story? The pettiness of it all; the fact that this everyday occurrence in the life of village sexuality, these inconsequential bucolic pleasures, could become, for a certain time, the object not only of a collective intolerance but of a judicial action, a medical intervention, a careful clinical examination, and an entire theoretical elaboration.

(Foucault 1977c: 31)

Undoubtedly, the incident at Lapcourt provides Foucault with a remarkable instance of how various apparatuses of the nineteenth-century state came crashing down to inspect, outlaw and punish this sexual act. But, on reflection, one is left wondering if the game of 'curdled milk' was both 'bucolic' and 'inconsequential' for the little girl. Rather than see how this incident might involve a terrified child who has been subject to sexual

harassment, if not abuse, Foucault shifts our attention, as Soper puts it, 'from the fright of the child victim to the phallic discipline of the academic luminary, whose vision is so dazzling on the issue of "significance" that it all but blinds us to what may really be of most moment' (Soper 1993: 43). Such sobering reflections give one pause when gauging Foucault's receptiveness to the power exercised in and through his primary tool of analysis: discourse.

Just as feminist critiques of *The History of Sexuality* find Foucault inattentive to categories of sex and gender, so too do post-colonial analysts experience disappointment in the way his work repeatedly marginalizes issues of racial difference. By taking her cue from Foucault's passing comments on the bourgeoisie's racialized desire to preserve their blood-line, Ann Laura Stoler asks many searching questions about why he thinks that under a 'new biopolitical regime, modern racism emerges out of the technologies of sex'. To Foucault, observes Stoler, 'racism is a consequence of that "class body" in the making'. But, as she points out, 'bourgeois bodies were constituted as racially and relationally coded from the outset' (Stoler 1995: 53). Stoler's aim is to disclose how ideas about racial difference were factored into a wide range of discursive formations that sought to regulate the social order, making it hard to give priority to one or other category:

Students of colonial discourses in Africa, Asia, and the Americas have often commented on a common thread: namely, that racialized Others invariably have been compared and equated with children, a representation that conveniently provided a moral justification for imperial policies of tutelage, discipline and specific paternalistic and maternalistic strategies of custodial control. But this equation of children and primitive, of children and colonized savage was not operative in overtly racist, colonial discourse alone. If we look to the childcare manuals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the same equation is present, but the other way around. Children are invariably othered in ways that compare them to lower-order beings, they are animal-like, lack civility, discipline, and sexual restraint; their instincts are base, they are too close to nature, they are, like racialized others, not fully human beings.

(Stoler 1995: 151)

Stoler's attentive commentary provides a timely reminder of how any discussion of eroticism would be unwise to assume that conceptions of race are subordinate to those of desire. Nor should cultural analysts labour under the misapprehension that race served as a locus for the exercise of power exclusively within colonized territories. Instead, ideas about racial difference had a constitutive role in shaping beliefs about the sexualities of both subaltern peoples and the children of the colonizers themselves. If this observation is not taken into account, then critics run the risk of presuming that sexuality shapes and determines all other relations of power. Bearing this question in mind, Sander Gilman remarks that race and sexuality intertwine when we consider a remark made by Freud in 1926: he claimed not to know the 'dark continent' of psychological research on adult female sexuality. This allusion to a phrase drawn from British imperialism, according to Gilman, ties 'female sexuality to the image of contemporary colonialism and thus to the exoticism and pathology of the Other' (Gilman 1985: 107). This is but one example that indicates how writings and representations of sexuality assume a certain racial definition. Exactly the same could be said about how imperialist concepts of blackness figure a sense of 'undifferentiated, pure sexuality' whose savagery remains unconstrained by cultural laws (Gilman 1985: 126). Both Stoler's and Gilman's critiques accentuate one of the main tendencies in Foucault's exploration of desire. Even if sexuality turns out to be a locus for understanding intense power relations, in Foucault's work the concept becomes the gravitational centre towards which all other social phenomena must fall.

Certainly, the very idea that sexuality is an appropriate topic for the exploration of domination, ethics and power has made several critics suspicious of Foucault's radicalism. Since *The History of Sexuality* applauds how the male citizens of ancient Greece cultivated a carefully stylized *askesis*, Terry Eagleton has argued from a Marxist standpoint that the ethics celebrated in *The Use of Pleasure* comprise little more than a highly individualistic aestheticization of the self. Eagleton sees *askesis* as a characteristic of the ruling classes in both ancient and modern cultures:

Foucault's Greeks believe that one should temper and refine one's practices not because they are inherently good or bad, but because self-indulgence leads to a depletion of one's vital powers – a familiar male fantasy if ever there was one. The more one aesthetically restrains oneself, the richer the powers which accrue to one – which is to say that power here would seem in romantic vein an unquestioned good, a wholly undifferentiated category. The positivity of power can thus be maintained, but converted into the basis of a discriminatory ethics by virtue of adding to it the techniques of prudence and temperance. And the ethical theory which is the upshot of this – that 'the physical regimen ought to accord with the principle of a general aesthetics of existence in which the equilibrium of the body was one of the conditions of the proper hierarchy of the soul' [Foucault 1985: 104] – has long been familiar on the playing fields of [the ancient English private school] Eton.

(Eagleton 1990: 394–95)

To Eagleton, Foucault's relentless desire to aestheticize the self in the name of resisting the powers mediated by external subjugating laws presents far too many intolerable paradoxes for it to be taken seriously. Eagleton observes that, in order to resist the pressures of such laws, the male citizen of ancient Greece simply takes them into his own hands, thus obtaining the privilege to exercise power over himself that he already imposes on all inferiors. Even though Foucault insists that self-regulation of this kind is a practice of freedom, Eagleton cannot help but notice how such *askesis* may well be duplicating the power structures it seeks to overcome. This is how Eagleton puts his case:

The individual must construct a relation with the self that is one of 'domination–submission', 'command–obedience', 'mastery–docility' [see Foucault 1985: 70]. Foucault is thus able to combine the concept of individual autonomy, which stands relatively free of the law, with the pleasures of sado-masochistic power such a law involves. What is gratifying and productive about power, its discipline and dominativeness, is salvaged from political oppressiveness and installed within the self. In this way one can enjoy the gains of hegemony without denying the pleasures of power. One might question, however, how

far this model really allows Foucault to escape from the lures of traditional hegemony.

(Eagleton 1990: 392)

On this view, Foucault's enduring emphasis on the aestheticization of the self becomes even more baffling when one sees how fiercely *The History of Sexuality* refuses to engage with traditional understandings of human subjectivity. Given his resistance to what he feels are the prohibitive laws governing psychoanalysis, Foucault rarely construes the subject in relation to affective or emotional response. His research has little or no interest in the subject's inner life. Such is Foucault's anti-humanism that he denies the subject any depth or psychological complexity. In this spirit, he firmly repudiates the realm of conflict between conscious and unconscious processes that fascinated Freud.

By refusing the subject the interiority familiar to both humanist, psychoanalytic, as well as certain Marxist orthodoxies, *The History of Sexuality* fashions the subject exclusively in terms of pleasures that rest on a somatic surface. The body, to which Foucault appeals so strongly as the locus of power and transformation, has no deep substance in his work. Placed at the centre of his theory, Foucault's concept of the body remains, so to speak, strategically disembodied – lacking all the features one associates with the humanist subject, such as psychology, intention, motivation, thought and feeling. Eagleton believes Foucault's idiosyncratic attitude amounts to an 'aestheticizing move towards the subject', and therefore 'leaves love as technique and conduct rather than as tenderness and affection, as praxis rather than interiority'. As a consequence, 'the body stands in for the subject and the aesthetic for the ethical' (Eagleton 1990: 395). Put so starkly, Eagleton's punishing Marxist critique demonstrates how Foucault's subject cannot be understood as an agent of social change, one able to enter into a compassionate and responsive relationship with the needs and desires of a community altogether larger than oneself. Lois McNay elaborates this point: 'Foucault provides no way of going beyond the minimal notion of the subject as a purely determined category to a fuller understanding of the subject as a thinking, willing, responsible agent of choice'

(McNay 1994: 103–4). In the case of sexuality, it may well seem that Foucault's model of power requires the very form of psychology he is the first to repudiate. For how do subjects internalize or resist those desires that regulate culture? Is it really the case that discourses lead to institutions that in turn proceed to practices in a seamless continuum? How might subjects operate within discourses in more than a merely instrumental way? Faced with such questions, his critics can therefore argue that Foucault's subject is so minimal that it cannot be seen as an agent of social change.

FOUCAULT'S FOLLOWERS

Taken together, these confrontational feminist, post-colonial and Marxist appraisals of *The History of Sexuality* may well make it seem that there are so many shortcomings to Foucault's understanding of desire that his work would be of little use to anyone interested in achieving radical political change. But from the first moment it appeared, his introductory volume was quickly welcomed by intellectuals grappling with the limiting critical vocabularies available to discuss sexuality. If Foucault's introductory volume made a distinct advance on earlier theories of desire, it was to show how explanatory categories such as sexuality itself had the devastating effect of naturalizing types of appropriate and inappropriate eroticism. In an essay dating from 1982, Biddy Martin insists on the useful challenge Foucault's work presents to selected strands of feminist thought that claim femininity is an unchanging essence that patriarchal culture brutally distorts. From her anti-essentialist position, Martin outlines the weaknesses in arguments that appeal to the universal spirit of femininity and female sexuality throughout the ages:

Some American radical feminists thought (the work, for example, of Mary Daly [1928–2010; see Daly 1978]) is, for all its importance and contributions, particularly susceptible to a polemic against patriarchy that ultimately ontologizes woman in terms of an essential superiority and a privileged relationship to nature and truth. The tendency in such polemics is to counter what are considered to be male

distortions of reality with what are held to be authentic female representations, and to correct male distortions with the authentic experience that can be read out of women's texts and lives. Unfortunately, this cultural criticism cannot go far beyond the assertion and documentation of a history of sexism, and our own cultural production is based on the premise that we as feminists can speak authentically, can speak the truth of ourselves for all women by virtue of our supposed exclusion from male culture and as a result of our rejection of their meanings.

(Martin 1988: 15)

Foucault's research, contends Martin, reveals why there are considerable dangers in assuming that feminism can recover an authentic and untainted ideal of femininity liberated from patriarchal domination. She claims that *The History of Sexuality* presents 'a warning against the commitment to any confessional mode as necessarily liberating, and a challenge to the notion that simply speaking or writing frees us in any simple way from patriarchy and phallocentrism' (Martin 1988: 15). According to Martin, once feminist critics accept that femininity has been regulated in historically contingent ways, it becomes possible to appreciate differences between women across eras, across classes and across cultures. Martin argues that much can be learned from Foucault's emphasis on how social phenomena are understood through power-laden discursive formations, since his theoretical model focuses attention on how femininity and masculinity are redefined over time. The same could be said about the arbitrary distinction that, for more than a century, has been forced between heterosexuality and homosexuality. If we respect this emphasis on the social construction of cultural categories to regulate power relations, the upshot of *The History of Sexuality* is to make us wonder how intellectuals ever came to the conclusion that femininity and masculinity, heterosexuality and homosexuality described phenomena that were unquestionably based in nature. Martin's strongly constructionist position would become increasingly influential among feminist theorists in the 1980s, leading to thorough critiques of essentialist approaches to sex and gender. (The intellectual battle waged between constructionist and

essentialist positions has been carefully explored by Diana Fuss [see Fuss 1989].)

It needs to be said, however, that *The History of Sexuality* was not the only work that made the social construction of sexuality a matter of concern among cultural theorists during the late twentieth century. As early as 1968, Mary McIntosh laid the foundations for such a theory in her classic essay, 'The Homosexual Role' (McIntosh 1981). Likewise, in *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain, from the Nineteenth Century to the Present* Jeffrey Weeks revealed 'a changing reality, both in the ways a hostile society labelled homosexuality, and in the way those stigmatized saw themselves' (Weeks 1977: 3). Read alongside Foucault's work, this substantial body of historical and sociological research proved immensely enabling for the area of inquiry that, by the mid-1980s, became known as lesbian and gay studies. Ten years later, this rapidly developing field diversified to such a degree that investigations into the cultural construction of desire were given a much more encompassing label: queer theory. In order to understand the transformation of lesbian and gay studies into queer theory, I shall examine some of the landmark writings that have transformed the repertoire of available terms to fathom the complexity of human sexuality. In my assessment of these materials, it will become clear that queer theory arose in an intellectual climate when critics were increasingly mindful of the anti-essentialist approach to gender and sexuality we have already encountered in Martin's feminist engagement with Foucault.

Acknowledging how *The History of Sexuality* has been the most influential and most emblematic text of the new scholarship on sex', Gayle Rubin counts among the foremost critics following Foucault's lead to 'identify, describe, explain, and denounce erotic injustice and sexual oppression' (Rubin 1993: 9–10). Trained as an anthropologist, Rubin has for many years been interested in how each society around the world constructs its own 'sex/gender system', 'a set of arrangements by which the biological raw material of human sex and procreation is shaped by human, social intervention and satisfied in a conventional manner, no matter how bizarre some of the conventions may be' (Rubin 1975: 165). First published in 1984, her powerful essay 'Thinking Sex'

(Rubin 1993) builds on her earlier work to demonstrate how the contemporary West arranges its beliefs about 'good' sexuality and 'bad' sexuality. In order to clarify her points, Rubin presents two diagrams that identify degrees of social acceptability and unacceptability among a range of sexual institutions and practices. Under the heading of 'good' or 'normal, natural, healthy, holy' sex, Rubin claims that heterosexual, married, monogamous, reproductive relations that occur 'at home' are regarded as the very 'best'. By contrast, under the heading 'bad' or 'abnormal, unnatural, sick, sinful, "way out"' sex, Rubin catalogues the ensuing group of deviants: transvestites, transsexuals, fetishists, sadomasochists, those engaging in cross-generational sex, as well as those who do it for money. In between these two poles, she designates the 'major area of contest' where one finds sexual behaviours and lifestyles that signal how attitudes are shifting across the moral terrain. In this liminal in-between zone, we find the following: unmarried heterosexual couples; promiscuous heterosexuals; masturbation; and long-term, stable same-sex relationships. Located somewhat closer to 'bad' sex are lesbians in the bar and promiscuous gay men in public places.

In tracing the migration of moral values across the terrain that maps these different styles of sexuality, Rubin observes how relations that are based purely on erotic gratification tend to tumble to the bottom of the hierarchy she has sketched, if with significant qualifications:

Only sex acts on the good side of the line are accorded moral complexity. For instance, heterosexual encounters may be sublime or disgusting, free or forced, healing or destructive, romantic or mercenary. As long as it does not violate other rules, heterosexuality is acknowledged to represent the full range of human experience. In contrast, all sex acts on the bad side of the line are considered utterly repulsive and devoid of all emotional nuance. The further from the line a sex act is, the more it is depicted as uniformly bad experience.

(Rubin 1993: 14–15)

Rubin's point is to show that a double standard operates when Western culture accords privilege to heterosexual relations.

Although opposite-sex encounters may well involve highly unpleasant and even exploitative sex acts, the very fact that these involve a man and a woman grants them much higher status than, for example, various non-consensual activities involving sexual dissidents, such as lesbians or transsexuals. But this is not, Rubin insists, a static model of how the West establishes its moral attitudes towards sexuality: 'Unmarried couples living together, masturbation, and some forms of homosexuality are moving in the direction of respectability.' In the meantime, many other sexual behaviours remain taboo: 'Promiscuous homosexuality, sadomasochism, fetishism, transsexuality, and cross-generational encounters are still viewed as unmodulated horrors incapable of involving affection, love, free choice, kindness, or transcendence' (Rubin 1993: 15). Rubin's belief is that the contested zone in the middle indicates how the moral values attached to sexuality are gradually shifting, as different styles of tolerance permit formally stigmatized erotic behaviours and identities to inch towards those deemed 'good'.

But it should be added that this account of how morality and sexuality are closely intertwined is not altogether as comprehensive as it might first appear. Nowhere does Rubin's mapping of 'good' and 'bad' sex make it clear how differing perceptions of gender can and do affect moral responses to sexuality. Just to give one example, effeminate styles of male homosexuality are frequently more vulnerable to public hostility than those that pass for straight. Similarly, in drawing up these sexual hierarchies, Rubin remains inattentive to how cultural differences might influence moral stances on erotic behaviour – even if later she is careful to note: 'Wealth, white skin, male gender, and ethnic privileges can mitigate the effects of sexual stratification. A rich, white, male pervert will generally be less affected than a poor, black, female pervert' (Rubin 1993: 22). And Rubin would surely not dissent from the view that different ethnic communities within the West adopt variable positions on such issues as monogamy, marriage and same-sex partnerships. There is no doubt that one major area of contention that she ignores, and which affects many sections of society, is inter-racial desire. These reservations aside, Rubin's influential 'Thinking Sex' puts the

spotlight on how 'a single ideal of sexuality characterizes most systems of thought about sex', whether in terms of religious commitments to 'procreative marriage' or psychological orthodoxies about 'mature heterosexuality' (Rubin 1993: 15).

Since differing institutions of power lay so much value upon the 'ideal' sexuality to which we should all aspire, it remains the case in the United States that the 'only adult sexual behaviour that is legal in every state is the placement of the penis in the vagina' (Rubin 1993: 20). Like Foucault, Rubin recognizes how fiercely state legislation seeks to control many types of sexuality that fall short of this 'ideal'. Consequently, she devotes much of her essay to highlighting exactly how 'moral panics' erupt around types of dissident eroticism that simply serve as scapegoats on to which society projects its greatest anxieties:

Because sexuality in Western societies is so mystified, the wars over it are often fought at oblique angles, aimed at phony targets, conducted with misplaced passions, and are highly, intensely symbolic. Sexual activities often function as signifiers for personal and social apprehensions to which they have no intrinsic connection. During a moral panic, such fears attach to some unfortunate sexual activity or population. The media become ablaze with indignation, the public behaves like a rabid mob, the police are activated, and the state enacts new laws and regulations.

(Rubin 1993: 25)

In clarifying this observation, Rubin pinpoints 'two current developments' that absorbed much political energy in the 1980s: 'the attacks on sadomasochists by a segment of the feminist movement, and the right's increasing use of AIDS to incite virulent homophobia'. Noting how, in the early 1980s, anti-porn feminists scapegoated SM imagery to reveal what purportedly caused sexual violence against women (see pp. 133–42), Rubin stresses how this kind of political campaigning was based on a misguided analysis. In declaring that pornography enacted the sexual subordination of women, the feminist anti-porn lobby extended the age-old prejudice that people practising forms of perverse sexuality were largely responsible for committing sex

crimes. Rubin observes that feminists crusading against pornography were playing into the censorious hands of the Moral Right. Equally troubling was the emergent 'moral panic' around the AIDS epidemic, which activated 'old fears that sexual activity, homosexuality, and promiscuity led to disease and death' (Rubin 1993: 26).

Both examples, in Rubin's view, show how 'bad' types of desire have served as convenient and defenceless targets when Western culture found itself unable to cope with the fearsome qualities attributed to sexuality. Anti-censorship feminists like Rubin are quick to remark that seemingly violent pornography that draws on SM imagery is the consequence, rather than the cause, of how the West eroticizes structures of domination and submission. She contends that this debate bears parallels with the depressing manner in which many right-wing moralists refused to view gay men as the victims of the AIDS epidemic. Instead, gay men – who for years comprised the largest group of sufferers in the West – were blamed for spreading a virus that continues to claim thousands upon thousands of lives. The moralistic imperative to make gay men culpable for the development of an appalling virus had dreadful repercussions: the US and UK governments were at first alarmingly inactive in taking positive steps both to support gay men suffering from the epidemic and to protect those who are uninfected. (Many would argue that, ever since AIDS became known by that acronym in the early 1980s, state funds have never been as forthcoming as they should be in dealing with an health crisis of global proportions. [On this issue, see Watney 1987.])

Rubin's innovative research has always been notable for the ways in which it has shaped cultural inquiries into sex and gender, especially how and why the West persists in stigmatizing homosexuality. Her earlier essay, 'The Traffic in Women' (1975), provided much inspiration for the book that would be most closely associated with the emergent field of lesbian and gay studies: *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1985). Although mainly comprising a series of ingenious interpretations of mostly nineteenth-century literary works (by Alfred Tennyson [1809–92] and Charles Dickens [1812–70], among others), Sedgwick's book was prefaced with a

deft and original introduction that laid out an innovative model for comprehending three related terms: homosexuality, homosociality and homophobia. In this distinguished study, Sedgwick explores how relations between men have been consolidated on the basis of 'erotic triangles': a concept adapted from the work of René Girard. Sedgwick claims that male-male desire is legitimated on a *homosocial* basis: that is, through bonds that maintain the privilege accorded to the male sex (Sedgwick 1985: 1-27). Such homosociality, which involves men working in patriarchal league with one another, is regulated by two forms of oppression: *homophobia* and *misogyny*. So, to ensure that relations between men retain their *social* pre-eminence, there have to be two sexual structures of oppression in place. On this view, we can see how male-dominated Western society uses marriage as an institution that involves the exchange of women between men. At the same time, heterosexual marriage retains its entitlement because of the stigma attached to male-male eroticism. If somewhat schematic in outline, Sedgwick's arrangement of social and sexual relations has one profound point to make: it remains difficult indeed to keep this particular cultural order intact. For the privilege granted to male-male relations stands in dangerous proximity to the very homosexuality that patriarchal fellowship is obliged to condemn.

Not all of Sedgwick's readers have been entirely convinced by her delineation of the sexual and social order. Lesbian critics have found Sedgwick's mapping of 'hetero-' and 'homo-' relations surprisingly exclusive in its emphasis on male-female and male-male desire (see, for example, Castle 1993: 67-73). But, if this model has a purpose, it is to reveal exactly why the dichotomy between opposite-sex and male same-sex eroticism should be so vigilantly maintained. The reason, of course, is that society has worked hard at dividing sexualities into 'hetero-' and 'homo-' antitheses because there is such a perilous relationship between the two. Since the late Victorian period, we have often assumed that this violent distinction described a natural state of affairs, rather than see how it performed an ideological manoeuvre, one that concealed a deep-seated problem in modern culture. Sedgwick's discussion asks us to ponder how 'in any male-dominated society, there is a special relationship between male homosocial (*including*

homosexual) desire and structures for maintaining and transmitting patriarchal power' (Sedgwick 1985: 25). So perhaps *social* and *sexual* relations between men actually lie in much closer proximity, one that the West has found exceptionally discomforting. The troubling closeness between the two, therefore, has been carefully masked by the influential division of male sexuality into antithetical types of 'hetero-' and 'homo-' object-choice.

Sedgwick elaborates this observation in the introduction to her next book, *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), which makes its critical concerns absolutely clear right on the opening page:

Epistemology of the Closet proposes that many of the major nodes of thought and knowledge in twentieth-century Western culture as a whole are structured – indeed, fractured – by a chronic, now endemic crisis of homo/heterosexual definition, indicatively male, dating from the end of the nineteenth century. The book will argue that an understanding of virtually any aspect of modern Western culture must be, not merely incomplete, but damaged in its central substance to the degree that it does not incorporate a critical analysis of modern homo/heterosexual definition; and it will assume that the appropriate place for that critical analysis to begin is from the relatively decentered perspective of modern gay and antihomophobic theory.

(Sedgwick 1990: 1)

By acknowledging that gay theory is 'decentered' (that is, still not central to academic debate, as well as less theoretically mature as feminist critique), Sedgwick argues that a gay-affirmative appraisal of Western culture needs to recognize how significantly the sharp distinction between 'hetero-' and 'homo-' has shaped many spheres of social life. No sooner has Sedgwick made this declaration than she clarifies her intellectual debt to Foucault. In many ways inspired by *The History of Sexuality*, her book focuses on how sexuality – especially the closeting of male homosexuality – has much to tell us about epistemology, the philosophical consideration of how we come to know what we know. As she says herself:

[I]n accord with Foucault's demonstration, whose results I take to be axiomatic, that modern Western discourse has placed what it calls

sexuality in a more and more distinctively privileged relation to our most prized constructs of individual identity, truth, and knowledge, it becomes truer and truer that the language of sexuality not only intersects with but transforms the other languages and relations by which we know.

(Sedgwick 1990: 3)

Sedgwick, therefore, believes that it is impossible to address sexuality as a phenomenon that can be treated as if it were separate from culture as a whole. Instead, the very system of thought engendered by the term sexuality pervades countless epistemological acts, particularly in the critical methods we use to derive knowledge about our own and other people's public image and personal lives.

On this basis, Sedgwick argues that 'modern homo/heterosexual division' involves ideas about sexuality that are far from stable and complete. She claims that the enduring use of this binary distinction rests on two opposed understandings of how to divide opposite-sex and same-sex desire. Sedgwick's interest lies in how twentieth-century theorists of sexuality tend to fall into two apparently different camps when analysing eroticism. In order to make her case, Sedgwick identifies two axes that cut between divergent perspectives on sexuality. The first dividing line splits 'minoritizing' from 'universalizing' views of desire, while the second separates 'sexual' from 'gender' definition (Sedgwick 1990: 88). Let me explain what these two distinctions imply.

The first distinction Sedgwick makes between these two standpoints reveals: (1) how sexuality is viewed as a matter of inborn essential identity ('minoritizing'); and (2) how desire is seen as part of a continuum that allows for choice ('universalizing'). Put another way, the 'minoritizing' perspective lays an emphasis on fixing sexual desire in terms of *either* 'hetero-' or 'homo-' definition. By contrast, the 'universalizing' stance regards sexual desire as spanning the whole gamut of opposite-sex and same-sex eroticism, locating bisexual desire at the centre of a broad range of erotic preferences.

The second distinction Sedgwick makes is between 'sexual' definition and 'gender' definition, and it too identifies a similar

antithesis between 'minoritizing' and 'universalizing' perspectives. This time, however, greater stress is put on the sexed body than on desire *per se*. Here we find, on the one hand, a gender 'separatist' standpoint underscoring the specific experiences of what it means to be male or female. One manifestation of this 'minoritizing' position would be lesbian separatism of the kind that developed in the 1970s when groups of women-loving women renounced the heteropatriarchy by living as independently as possible from men. On the other hand, there are 'universalizing' attitudes that celebrate the 'liminality' or 'transitivity' of gender, effacing hard and fast divisions between the male and female sex. Under this heading, Sedgwick includes phenomena like androgyny, as well as styles of political campaigning such as solidarity between lesbians and gay men. One might add that transgendered and transsexual identities present models of gender liminality, since they suggest a transitive movement that eradicates any fixed boundary between male and female, masculinity and femininity.

In effect, these competing outlooks on sexuality contend that it is either an immutable essence ('minoritizing') or a transformable construction ('universalizing'). Put even more crudely, this clash of interests presents the age-old stand-off between those who believe that 'nature' and those who think that 'nurture' determines sexual behaviour. Like Rubin in 'Thinking Sex', Sedgwick is keenly aware that her schematic model can only bear out general tendencies in contemporary understandings of sexuality. By her own admission, this is a 'misleadingly symmetrical map' that fails to show how various theories of desire may hold views emanating from opposing 'minoritizing' and 'universalizing' camps (Sedgwick 1990: 90). But that is the point. In outlining these distinctions, Sedgwick draws attention to the 'highly structured discursive incoherence' inscribed in both 'sexual' and 'gender' positions. Her map provokes many questions about the categories we use to comprehend sexuality. Is erotic identity specific to one's sexed body? Or is it a fluid phenomenon that traverses a complex ensemble of gendered meanings – a whole range of femininities and masculinities that are not necessarily grounded in the anatomical distinction between the sexes? Such inquiries are the result of how painstakingly Sedgwick has followed Foucault's lead,

creating the space in which the new academic field of lesbian and gay studies could explore the epistemological structures surrounding sexuality.

Published in the same year as *Epistemology of the Closet*, Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990) – a work that remains a major point of reference in inquiries into the psychic and social formation of masculinities and femininities – draws imaginatively on Foucault's writings to produce a fresh analysis of how we construct categories to understand sex, gender and desire. Throughout her discussion, Butler explores why 'gender' has been a source of 'trouble' in feminist debate. Why should the term gender have been such a vexed issue? In answering this question, Butler focuses our attention on the ways in which discursive practices frequently create the very problems they are striving to analyse. She explains this point by concentrating on a distinctly Foucauldian paradox of the kind one finds in the introduction to *The History of Sexuality*. Here Butler ponders what it meant for her as a child to get into 'trouble':

To make trouble was, in the reigning discourse of my childhood, something one should never do precisely because that would get one *in* trouble. The rebellion and its reprimand seemed to be caught up in the same terms, a phenomenon that gave rise to my first critical insight into the subtle ruse of power: The prevailing law threatened one with trouble, even put one in trouble, all to keep one out of trouble.

(Butler 1990: ix)

Highly attentive to this type of double bind, Butler proceeds with her examination of 'gender trouble' by pursuing what Foucault calls a 'genealogical analysis' (Foucault 1977b: 142). In his appropriation of the term 'genealogy' from Nietzsche, Foucault was concerned with tracing how sets of ideas grouped around a phenomenon such as sexuality. 'A genealogical critique', writes Butler, 'refuses to search for the origins of gender, the inner truth of female desire, a genuine or authentic sexual identity that repression has kept from view'. Instead, 'genealogy investigates the political stakes in designating as an *origin* and *cause* those identity categories that are in fact the *effects* of

institutions, practices, and discourses with multiple and diffuse points of origin' (Butler 1990: x–xi). By following Foucault in this way, Butler reaches some impressive conclusions about exactly why gender has been such a source of intellectual 'trouble'. Not only that, she explores how 'gender trouble' can open up radical possibilities for social transformation. Such transformation, she argues, comes into view when we consider the performative condition of gender. This is an influential concept that requires careful exposition, not least because it was misconstrued by many of Butler's earliest readers. In order to understand why 'gender attributes ... are not expressive but performative', we need to follow selected aspects of Butler's sedulous genealogical critique of how distinctions have been made between sex, gender, and desire (Butler 1990: 141).

One of Butler's principal aims in *Gender Trouble* is to explore how a restrictive binary logic has trapped critical understandings of sex and gender. Since the 1960s at least, modern feminist analysis frequently insisted that sex referred to the sexed body (female or male) while gender signified the sexual meanings attributed to the sexed body (femininity or masculinity). At its most basic, this distinction claimed that sex was determined by nature, while gender was moulded by culture. Although the general assumption was that male bodies were the basis of masculinity, while female bodies were the ground of femininity, seldom did feminist critics examine the potential severance of sex from gender. Butler argues that, if sex is fashioned by nature, while gender is generated by culture, then these two phenomena emerge from divergent sources. Gender, then, does not necessarily proceed from sex:

If gender is the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes, then a gender cannot be said to follow from a sex in any one way. Taken to its logical limit, the sex/gender distinction suggests a radical discontinuity between sexed bodies and culturally constructed genders. Assuming for the moment the stability of binary sex, it does not follow that the construction of 'men' will accrue exclusively to the bodies of males or that 'women' will interpret only female bodies. Further, even if the sexes appear to be unproblematically binary in

their morphology and constitution (which will become a question), there is no reason to assume that genders ought also to remain as two. The presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it. When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one.

(Butler 1990: 6)

Even if Western culture generally assumes that sex provides the anatomical basis on which the cultural edifice of gender is built, Butler's project is to explain why there can indeed be subversive separations between the two terms. Effeminate mannerisms present one dissident style of manhood that the West often treats with considerable contempt. By comparison, female masculinity often poses a distinct challenge to the social order. One only has to recall how butch lesbians are habitually stigmatized for their unorthodox self-presentation. Both examples suggest that we need to think more subtly about the broad repertoire of gendered styles that men and women may adopt. Butler urges us to contemplate how gender needs to be understood as a pluralizing concept, one that appreciates many different femininities and masculinities in all their variety. At the same time, she casts suspicion on the very idea that 'sex' should be designated as a phenomenon grounded in nature. Culture, after all, has played an undeniable role in naming and understanding 'sex', establishing it as a marker that creates a seemingly natural distinction when in fact it is an arbitrary sign of difference. Sex, therefore, is just as much a cultural construction as gender is presumed to be.

So why has the West maintained such a narrow view of a neatly integrated 'sex/gender system'? Why was it the case that critics rarely questioned the contradictions and tensions at the heart of this approach to sex and gender? Butler claims that it is the assumptions that make heterosexuality an apparently natural institution which keep the binary oppositions of female and male, femininity and masculinity solidly in place. Since heterosexuality

appears to have such structural integrity, it remains hard to imagine alternative conceptual frameworks. In the following passage, Butler explains why heterosexuality often had such success in governing how we might think about the relations between sex and gender:

Gender can denote a *unity* of experience, of sex, of gender, and desire, only when sex can be understood in some sense to necessitate gender – where gender is a psychic and/or cultural designation of the self – and desire – where desire is heterosexual and therefore differentiates itself through an oppositional relation to that other gender it desires. The internal coherence or unity of either gender, man or woman, thereby requires both a stable and oppositional heterosexuality. That institutional heterosexuality both requires and produces the univocity of each of the gendered terms that constitute the limit of gendered possibilities within an oppositional, binary gender system. This conception of gender presupposes not only a causal relation among sex, gender, and desire, but suggests as well that desire reflects or expresses gender and that gender reflects or expresses desire.

(Butler 1990: 22)

Here Butler carefully elaborates how dominant ideas about heterosexuality suppose that sex and gender are terms that can be split into opposite and yet complementary pairs: female and male, feminine and masculine. As a consequence, heterosexual desire proceeds from this system of gendered couplings. That is to say, the binary structure of gender finds its complement in opposite-sex attraction. In heterosexuality, then, desire and gender are so mutually reinforcing that it becomes hard to see how its sex/gender system is anything but natural. If gender involves a stable antithesis, and desire requires the reciprocity of each sex, then the apparent coherence of heterosexuality can prove overwhelming – so much so that erotic preferences dissenting from this model can look extremely strange.

Butler's theoretical goal is to *denaturalize* what she calls the 'heterosexual matrix' (Butler 1990: 35). She takes her cue from Foucault to demonstrate, first of all, how influential theoretical

work in anthropology (Lévi-Strauss) and psychoanalysis (Freud, Lacan) have appealed to cultural laws that stabilize this sexual system. By testing the limits of these theories, she then examines the exclusionary logics that strive to repel the homosexual and bisexual desires that threaten to overthrow the primacy of opposite-sex eroticism. Unlike Foucault, however, Butler is prepared to explore structures of psychic identification to understand how the subject organizes its desires, particularly in insubordinate ways. In this respect, her model of the subject is not the empty one featured in *The History of Sexuality*. Rather, her interest is in how psychoanalysis can be used against itself to expose the mechanisms through which the subject might experience psychic identifications that repudiate the power of the heterosexual matrix (see Butler 1990: 35–78). In her view, close attention needs to be paid to psychic mechanisms so that we can more fully comprehend why the cultural injunction to become heterosexual does not always work.

The upshot of *Gender Trouble* is to demonstrate exactly how and why sex, gender and desire do not necessarily fit into the neat binary order of heterosexuality. And it is here that Butler formulates her ideas about the performative condition of gender. Butler uses the word performative to describe how the body provides a surface upon which various acts and gestures accrue gendered meanings. What she calls ‘corporeal signification’ reveals that gender does not appeal to an ontological essence granted by nature (Butler 1990: 136). Rather, the widespread belief that there is indeed a core gender identity actually depends on performative acts that give the illusion of naturalness. To support her point, Butler discusses gay male drag to illuminate the question of gender performance:

The notion of an original or primary gender is often parodied within the cultural practices of drag, cross-dressing, and the sexual stylization of butch/femme identities [in lesbian cultures]. Within feminist theory, such parodic identities have been understood to be either degrading to women, in the case of drag or cross-dressing, or an uncritical appropriation of sex-role stereotyping from within the practice of heterosexuality, especially in the case of butch-femme lesbian

identities. But the relation between the 'imitation' and the 'original' is, I think, more complicated than that critique generally allows. Moreover, it gives us a clue to the way in which the relationship between primary identification – that is, the original meanings accorded to gender – and subsequent gender experience might be reframed. The performance of drag plays upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed. But we are actually in the presence of three contingent dimensions of significant corporeality: anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance. If the anatomy of the performer is already distinct from the gender of the performer, and both of those are distinct from the gender of the performance, then the performance suggests a dissonance not only between sex and performance, but sex and gender, and gender and performance.

(Butler 1990: 137)

Butler argues that drag, in principle at least, has the virtue of showing that gender is an emphatically '*imitative structure*': that is, a structure that reveals how being female or male, feminine or masculine, entails a performance that requires the production of specific bodily signs. Instead of claiming that drag simply copies an original gender identity, Butler contends that this flamboyant theatricality shows how all gender identities are themselves derivative copies. Through performative acts, each of us learns to become a woman or a man, feminine or masculine.

Gender Trouble concludes on an inspiring note: to devise ways of confounding the naturalized appearance of gender in its heterosexual guise. Undoubtedly, lesbian and gay cultures have done much to perform what is colloquially known as the 'gender fuck' by engaging with cross-dressing and butch/femme role-playing that baffle the apparently natural link between sex and gender. Yet some critics have been suspicious of Butler's rallying-cry to produce 'a radical proliferation of gender' that will '*displace* the very gender norms that enable the repetition' shaping each and every performance (Butler 1990: 148). Ed Cohen, for example, has stated that Butler's model could be viewed as 'voluntarist', since it suggests that genders can be made and remade at will (Cohen 1991: 83). But Butler, in fairness, emphasizes how the

'I' that performs gender does not stand outside the discursive structure that gives femininity and masculinity their multiple meanings. Instead, the subject operates within a field of signification that strives to regulate the production of sex, gender and desire. That signifiatory field, however, can none the less be adjusted, contested, if not revolutionized through insubordinate performances of gender.

So that we can see how understandings of sex, gender and desire might be transformed within performative practices, the time has come to turn to the final topic of this chapter: queer theory. Unquestionably, both *Epistemology of the Closet* and *Gender Trouble* have done much to define this emergent area of inquiry. It is perhaps no accident that both of these books appeared in 1990, the year that brought the activist group Queer Nation to public attention. The imaginative public interventions made by Queer Nation set the terms of a distinctly Foucauldian debate about the labels that have been used to define, limit and indeed naturalize the distinction between heterosexuality and homosexuality. By employing styles of political protest that developed out of ACT UP (the Aids Coalition to Unleash Power) in New York City, Queer Nation had among its many ambitions the desire to expand the vocabulary used to name and know styles of sexuality. In large part, these activists were frustrated with the complacency of an established lesbian and gay movement that had, from the late 1960s onwards, espoused itself more and more to a constraining and unquestioning 'identity politics'. Sexual liberation, they argued, had been misled by the belief that lesbians and gay men had distinctive and essential identities. Not only that, they felt the lesbian and gay movement had constructed an exclusionary political agenda that made it difficult for anyone who did not conform to these identities to join in their struggles. To take just one example, bisexual men and bisexual women were at times debarred from this political movement, on the grounds that bisexuality involved treacherous intimacy with the heterosexual enemy. Consequently, bisexuals were quick to note the biphobia endemic to lesbian and gay politics. In principle, Queer Nation had no patience with exclusions of this kind. Since it embraced many communities of sexual dissidents, this movement promoted

a controversial discursive strategy to create an innovative paradigm for thinking about sexuality. Since the 1920s, the word queer had been routinely used as an insult hurled at homosexuals. By wresting this term from the oppressors, this activist group resignified its meaning. In doing so, Queer Nation performed a decisive act of repeating a term only to displace it. In academic contexts, queer theory now encompasses the study of diverse forms of sexual dissidence, each of which questions the heterosexual matrix.

Given her sensitivity to the discursive regimes that have long inhibited our knowledge of sex, gender and desire, Butler has been quick to respond to the possible fate that might befall queer politics. Since all descriptive terms are in danger of being naturalized through repetition, she contends that the word should remain a subject of productive debate. It would, indeed, be a sad irony if queer ultimately became a token of precisely those kinds of normative thinking it initially sought to contest:

If the term 'queer' is to be a site of collective contestation, the point of departure for a set of historical considerations and futural imaginings, it will have to remain that which is, in the present, never fully owned, but always and only redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage and in the direction of urgent and expanding political purposes. This also means that it will doubtless have to be yielded in favour of terms that do that political work more effectively. Such a yielding may well become necessary in order to accommodate – without domesticating – democratizing contestations that have and will redraw the contours of the movement in ways that can never be fully anticipated in advance.

(Butler 1993: 228)

Rather than assume that the word queer will resolve the problem of sexual and gender definition once and for all, Butler recognizes that this emergent term may be superseded at some point in the future. There is no doubt that the words we use to interpret sexuality are historically contingent. If we become more reflective in our handling of the terms we use to imagine sex, gender and desire, then the greater becomes the possibility of resignifying our

desires in ways that loosen the naturalizing power of the heterosexual matrix. But this is hardly to claim that opposite-sex relations should not be celebrated. Far from it. Butler's point is that all sexualities need to be denaturalized, thus maximizing the opportunities to create consensual types of intimacy and to perform our genders in a truly liberated environment. By concentrating on the discursive construction of sexuality, queer theory is a major consequence of Foucault's introduction to *The History of Sexuality*. It is a development in social theory to which we might assume he would have given his approval. In the final chapter, I discuss some of the main recent developments in queer thinking about sexuality, in ways that build on and extend beyond Foucault's enduring theoretical legacy.

5

DIVERSE EROTICISMS

QUEER (NON)IDENTITIES

The emergence of queer theory in the 1990s served at least two main purposes in academic inquiries into sexuality. On the one hand, the rebellious employment of the once-stigmatized term 'queer' has questioned, if not undermined, the essentialist assumptions about identity politics that activist groups are supposed to have made about the seemingly stable and exclusive meanings of the words 'lesbian' and 'gay'. In campaigns aimed at fighting discrimination and inspiring lesbian and gay pride, political groupings had since the mid-twentieth century based their goals on protecting the lives, needs and rights of recognizable sexual constituencies that had frequently suffered many different forms of disapproval, prohibition and violence in both private and public spaces. Both 'lesbian' and 'gay' remain highly prominent terms that define individuals and communities demanding freedom for the right to live, associate and enjoy intimacy with members of their own sex. While 'queer' has in many ways continued these political objectives by extending the activism of organizations such as Queer Nation, the term at the same time has demanded

much greater inclusivity and respect for a broad range of oppositional forms of sexual expression that were not originally recognizable through the words 'lesbian' and 'gay'. On the other hand, in its impulse to respect the diversity of sexual modalities of being, the advent of queer theory has encouraged researchers to look more attentively at the growing body of writings that address insubordinate and frequently stigmatized sexual subjectivities that do not readily fall strictly within identities founded on same-sex desire. Accordingly, spokespeople within bisexual, transgender and transsexual communities, in particular, have demanded recognition of the specific claims that characterize their sexualities, often in ways that expose the limitations of viewing sexuality by way of reference to terms that posit an authentic, fixed or uniform identity.

As a result, at the moment when queer theory came to establish itself as the field that had greatest authority in the cultural study of sexuality, there was a concurrent development that led to the formation of academic centres, departments and programmes in the area of inquiry designated by the letters LGBT. This awkward acronym combines two letters (the 'L' and the 'G') that specify the terms through which male and female same-sex desire had long been understood, while adding two other letters (the 'B' and the 'T') that assign forms of sexual embodiment and expression that are not necessarily grounded in a fixed or containable identity. Moreover, LGBT encrypts a complicated history about the ways in which the analysis of socially noncompliant sexualities has evolved in the past twenty years. Since, in the 1980s and 1990s, lesbians sometimes raised objections to the presumptive dominance of gay men within activist politics, their identity gained respectful priority at the start of this inelegant run of initials. Afterwards, when bisexual people became increasingly vocal in their exclusion from radical movements campaigning for sexual rights, their capital letter ('B') was added belatedly to this composite heading. Simultaneously, when transgender intellectuals challenged the marginalization that they had at times experienced in struggles for sexual recognition, the final letter ("T") was supplemented to this growing ensemble.

Consequently, in some quarters the acronym LGBT has been greeted with a measure of scepticism. Although Michael Warner

is ready to concede that 'a political movement that defines its constituency solely as "gay men and lesbians" blinds itself to the subtlety of the oppressive culture to the breadth of the possible resistances', he also notes that the overdue additions of bisexual and transgender people to this litany of initials are 'often rightly perceived ... as afterthoughts, half-hearted gestures of being politically correct' (Warner 1999: 38–39). Warner's understandable inclination is to use the term 'queer', instead of LGBT, 'in a deliberately capacious way' (Warner 1999: 38). But, as some commentators have observed, even if the desire for such inclusive capaciousness can encourage the creation of alliances between sexual communities that remain subject to shame, the very gesture towards embracing all types of sexual dissidence under a single elastic heading can have its drawbacks. Not only does 'queer' have the potential to occlude the needs of particular communities contained within the term; it can also, correspondingly, make it seem as if all categories of sexual non-conformism have some natural affinity with one another, simply because they deviate from what is posited as 'straight' (i.e. institutionally legitimated forms of other-sex intimacy).

The divergence of thinking on whether to endorse queerness (in the name of eroding inflexible ideas about sexual identity) or to maintain identity politics (in the name of grounding one's politics in a recognizable constituency) can be explained through two instructive examples. To Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, the term 'queer' opens opportunities to show that 'sexual identity', as it is commonly perceived, has so many dimensions that it is impossible to 'organize [them] into a seamless and univocal whole', by grounding them solely in concepts such as sexual object-choice or sexual orientation (Sedgwick 1993: 8). She proceeds to open up a potentially endless repertoire of defiant sexual styles, practices and modes of being that relish their power to differentiate themselves from rigid designations of sexual identity based on a person's attraction to the 'biological sex of your preferred partner' (Sedgwick 1993: 8):

That's one of the things that 'queer' can refer to: the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and

excess of meanings when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or *can't be* made) to signify monolithically. The experimental linguistic, epistemological, representational, political adventures attaching to the very many of us who at times may be moved to describe ourselves as (among many other possibilities) pushy femmes, radical faeries, fantasists, drags, clones, leatherfolk, ladies in tuxedos, feminist women or feminist men, masturbators, bulldaggers, divas, Snap! queens, butch bottoms, storytellers, transsexuals, aunties, wannabes, lesbian-identified men or lesbians who sleep with men, or ... people able to relish, learn from, or identify with such.

(Sedgwick 1993: 8)

Sedgwick's densely populated list, which moves in a celebratory spirit through a thought-provoking ensemble of erotic, gendered and political modes of being, certainly animates the idea that 'queer' can provide a suitable framework for comprehending the richly textured diversity of sexual subcultures, none of which can be readily understood as defining, in a limiting way, one's authentic, complete or true identity. Noticeably, Sedgwick views this highly divergent, if not deliberately randomized, inventory as a catalogue of self-descriptions that individuals can use in an enabling manner to characterize their sexual sensibilities, political commitments and erotic affiliations. But, from another angle, one might contend that this extrapolation of the seemingly innumerable possibilities that 'queer' might accommodate resembles a questionable type of relativism or pluralism, in which any sexual modality that dissents from whatever is posited as the norm can coexist in comparable conditions of resistance.

By contrast, in *Disability Theory* (2008), a work that has much to say on the assumptions of able-bodiedness that underlie some queer understandings of sexual stigma, Tobin Siebers claims that it is naïve to assume that identity politics is embedded in simplistic suppositions about labels that indisputably define one's genuine core of being. Siebers's thoughtful approach to the 'blatant and persistent prejudices directed against disabled people' insists that once individuals experience 'feelings of horror and disgust' at such contumely there arises the opportunity to create

an empowering identity politics that can provide rallying-points for groups 'to address social injustices against minority peoples' (Siebers 2008: 15). His leading point is that it remains mistaken to ground identity politics on an individualistic belief in an authentic self. Identity, Siebers contends, is 'neither a liability nor a disability.' 'Nor', he adds, 'is it an ontological property or state of being' (Siebers 2008: 15). Instead, he advances that view that identity, far from encapsulating 'a person's pristine individuality or inner essence', designates the process through which people identify with 'a set of social narratives, ideas, myths, values and types of knowledge of varying reliability, usefulness, and verifiability'. On this view, identity is enmeshed in processes of identification that connect the individual subject with a larger group (i.e. 'the means by which the person, qua individual, comes to join a particular social body' [Siebers 2008: 15]). Siebers proceeds to argue that this account of identity becomes a highly politicized matter when individuals recognize their affiliation with a social body that has been systematically abused, suffered discrimination or defined as a disposable minority. He points out that the concept of 'minority discourse', which has developed with particular potency in the field of post-colonial studies, allows constituencies that have been pushed to the margins to come together for the purpose of producing critiques of the unjust forms of power that seek to repress them. The upshot of Siebers' discussion is that identity politics is crucial to political organizing, which also involves an awareness that terms such as 'disabled' are in themselves open to question and redefinition. ('Deaf and intersex people have resisted being described as disabled', he observes; 'their future relation to the identity of disabled people is not clear' (Siebers 2008: 17).)

On further analysis, the assembled components in the acronym LGBT, despite its graceless gestures towards additive inclusivity, reveal that there are decisive distinctions that need to be recognized between each of the sexual minorities that it encompasses. Moreover, the forms of identification that each letter embodies show that while lesbian gay, bisexual and transgender people might have a shared interest in remaining grouped together for the purpose of creating syllabi in colleges and in advancing

activist campaigns, the cardinal issues that define each of these groups show that the 'L', 'G', 'B', 'T' are in many respects separable from one another. In the 1990s, bisexuality became a highly contested term because, from the perspective of some lesbian and gay thinkers, it proved hard to take seriously the political radicalism of a sexual identity that refused to settle on a homosexual object-choice and chose instead to 'swing both ways' in a supposedly non-committal manner between the hegemonic, oppressive straight world and the shamed and stigmatized queer one. In an important article, Elisabeth A. Däumer writes that one of the difficulties facing critical discussions of bisexuality is that it 'occupies an ambiguous position between identities', since its unsettled relation to both hetero- and homosexuality suggests that it has something unique to contribute to static, restrictive and, by implication, mono-sexual identity politics. Bisexuality, Däumer observes, 'is able to shed light on the gaps and contradictions of all identity, what we might call the difference within identity' (Däumer 1999: 159). Even if some bisexual people might increase their well-being through having a 'unified bisexual identity', it remains the case for Däumer that the 'ambiguous position' that bisexuality holds between sexual identifications might be thought to betoken certain advantages, since it 'can also lead to a deep appreciation of the differences among people – whether cultural, sexual, gendered – since any attempt to construct a coherent identity in opposition to another would flounder on the multiplicity of at times conflicting identifications generated by the bisexual point of view' (Däumer 1999: 159).

Däumer's comments imply that the 'multiplicity' inhabiting the 'B' may well encourage some individuals identifying with the 'L' and the 'G' to be more open to others whose sexual choices and acts appear to be diametrically opposed to their own. Several of the most prominent writers on bisexuality from the 1990s, notably Jo Eadie, tried to conceptualize bisexuality as a 'miscegenate location', one whose 'hybridity' – another term appropriated from post-colonial studies – provides ways of contesting the 'exclusion and sexual purism' of lesbians and gay men who hold bisexuals in suspicion (Eadie 1999: 136). As Eadie suggests, it remains impossible for the 'L' and the 'G' in LGBT to expel sexual

pluralism on the grounds that bisexuality involves a betrayal of politics that uphold the right to express same-sex intimacy. Yet it is noticeable that, in making his claims on the pluralism that bisexuality demands within struggles for sexual emancipation, he employs highly charged terms that assume that the 'B' can be readily metaphorized through categories of race. Critical theorists may well question whether historically stigmatized terms such as 'hybridity' and 'miscegenation' are entirely suitable for articulating the radical contribution that bisexuality can make to sexual pluralism.

The 'T' remains arguably even more pluralist and multiple than the 'B' in LGBT. Susan Stryker, one of the best-known historians of transgender history in the United States, is careful to remind us that '[a] lot of acronyms are used by members of the T section of the LGBTIQQA (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, questioning, and allies) community' (Stryker 2008: 21). It remains to be seen if this 'alphabet soup', as Stryker wittily nicknames it, might be plausibly expanded any further, since it can prove hard to recite, let alone differentiate between, each and every sexuality linked by these letters. (The two 'Q's can be confusing.) But, as Stryker insists, respect must be paid to the power that other acronyms, such as MTF (male-to-female) and FTM (female-to-male), signify in 'T' communities. Throughout her largely historical study, Stryker traces the paths that led to the importance that MTF and FTM have had in building identity and community among trans people, which of course characterizes individuals who have transitioned to a gender that is different from the one that society expected to be modelled on the sexed body that they were born with. As Stryker explains, a person may transition to a different gender with or without undergoing surgical intervention, hormonal treatment or other medical procedures that assist individuals in expressing the masculinities or femininities that they wish to embody. Stryker marks 1990 as the year when, in the United States, especially in California, 'the transgender community experienced a rapid evolution and expansion', and she acknowledges that two writers in particular – activist and novelist Leslie Feinberg and postmodern theorist Sandy Stone – brought about a much-needed shift away from the

pathologizing register that typified much cultural and political discussion of transsexuality: the term, whose modern medical usage originates in the work of German endocrinologist Harry Benjamin (1885–1986), is closely associated with the Gender Identity Clinic that American psychiatrist Robert Stoller (1924–91) directed at the University of California, Los Angeles. David Valentine, in his anthropological study of MTFs in New York City, observes that that '[q]ueer theory, and the activism organized by this term, arose at almost the same moment as “transgender” in the early 1990s’ (Valentine 2007: 24). Valentine points out that he is unwilling to present the term ‘transsexual’ with its conventional medial double ‘s’ because the word has ‘pathologizing implications’, whereas the broad-ranging label ‘transgender’ does not (Valentine 2007: 25). When he employs ‘transsexual’, Valentine spells it with a single ‘s’, since the ‘activist informants’ with whom he conducted his field work expressed a preference for it. ‘My usage’, he says, ‘may seem like a conceit, but if nothing else it marks the historical moment and the context’ in which he worked (Valentine 2007: 25).

This fresh generation of writing from within and about the ‘T’ has served to contest one of the most hostile feminist books ever written on MTFs, Janice Raymond’s *The Transsexual Empire* (1979). Raymond, whose research was guided by radical lesbian separatist Mary Daly, characterizes MTFs as patriarchs in drag, intent on colonizing the female body. ‘All transsexuals’, Raymond writes in a universalizing tone, ‘rape women’s bodies by reducing the female form to an artifact, appropriating this body for themselves’ (Raymond 1979: 104). Never before had gender essentialism expressed such an inflexible attitude. Raymond finds it impossible to see that the desire for a male-born person to express femininity might involve the transformation of an individual’s gender. Instead, she views MTFs confirming existing sexual binaries that keep hierarchies of male and female firmly in place.

The richly expansive meaning of the non-clinical term transgender runs so strongly against Raymond’s preconceived notions of masculinity and femininity that it only makes sense once sex and gender are conceptually prised apart. Feinberg recounts the

following anecdote to explain how s/he has coped with habitual misunderstanding of her/his identity:

‘You were born female, right?’ The reporter asked me for the third time. I nodded patiently. ‘So do you identify as female now, or male?’

She rolled her eyes as I repeated my answer. ‘I am transgendered. I was born female, but my masculine gender expression is seen as male. It’s not my sex that defines me, and it’s not my gender expression. It’s the fact that my gender expression appears to be at odds with my sex. Do you understand? It’s the social contradiction between the two that defines me.’

The reporter’s eyes glazed over as I spoke. When I finished she said, ‘So you’re a third sex?’ Clearly, I realized we had very little language with which to understand each other.

(Feinberg 1996: 101)

Throughout her/his eloquent cultural history, Feinberg frequently observes that many non-Western cultures have held transgender people in high esteem, sometimes according them special roles in religious ceremonies. But no matter how postmodern the West has become, it remains the case that almost every time we use a public bathroom a choice has to be made between ‘men’ and ‘women’. Given her/his chosen gender expression, Feinberg has decided to enter her/his sex as male on official documents. Yet in doing so s/he has broken the law, since her/his genital sex remains female. The challenge raised by Feinberg’s chosen sexual identity has doubtless become evident in the typographic slashes I have used to designate her/his pronominal position. The slashes, however, are meant to be respectful. Since transgender identities sometimes powerfully bewilder the line between male and female, even basic pronouns can become obstacles to understanding. Feinberg raises the question whether transgender people should encourage the use of pronouns such as ‘hir’ and ‘ze’, which combine (or perhaps reconfigure) male and female. Yet Feinberg is acutely aware that such linguistic moves might only perpetuate the age-old stereotype of the ‘third sex’ that the term transgender itself seeks to dislodge.

One point that becomes immediately noticeable in the difference that the ‘T’ makes in LGBT is the attention that this letter

draws to gender rather than sexuality. Like the preceding clinical terms from which it seeks to make a break, transgender ostensibly concentrates its emphasis on gender rather than desire, which in some ways implies that even the 'sexuality' in transsexuality has more to do with changes of 'sex' and expressions of femininity and masculinity than it has to do with eroticism. (The same might be said of the term 'transvestite', which has its origins in the German sex radical Magnus Hirschfeld's study of cross-dressers, *Die Transvestiten* [*Transvestites*] [1910].) Yet the very idea that people who identify themselves as transgender – a large expansive category that embraces individuals whose gender falls outside socially approved or conventional expectations – are in some way not sexual beings indicates that the term can be open to serious misreading. Valentine is highly sensitive to the vocabularies that his MTF subjects employ to clarify their erotic identities or preferences. Thus he at times respects his informants' descriptions of themselves as 'butches, fem queens, transvestites (and even as gay and homosexual) without collapsing them into or replacing them with "transgender"' (Valentine 2007: 27). Such critical flexibility enables him to create a respectful account of the multifarious gender and erotic articulations that can be referred to, though not necessarily contained by, the 'T'.

Much recent debate within transgender studies has focused on the materiality of the transgender body that undergoes surgical intervention in transition from M to F or F to M. Jay Prosser's powerful discussion of the French psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu's concept of the 'skin ego' seeks to show that the 'body's physical surface or encasing provides the anaclitic [i.e. "leaning-on"] support for the psychic apparatus: the ego, the sense of self, derives from the experience of the material skin' (Prosser 1998: 65). On this view, Prosser proceeds to explain that for the transsexual one's life narrative involves a recognition that one's body has been 'marked wrongly' and then involves procedures that will enable one's body to be 'marked correctly' (Prosser 1998: 67):

What makes it possible for a male-to-female transsexual to name the somatic material (skin, tissue, and nerves) transplanted from his forearm or his abdomen to his groin 'my penis', or for a male-to-female

transsexual to name the inverted remains of her penis ‘my vagina’ is a refiguring of the sexed body that takes place along corporeal, psychic, and symbolic axes. Gendered becoming, becoming a man or a woman, occurs for the transsexual at these points of intersection, complex crossings for sure but the investment in the flesh is undeniable.

(Prosser 1998: 67)

It would seem hard to contest the belief that for transsexual subjects the desire to be at one with the ‘skin ego’ indisputably means overcoming the profound alienation involved in recognizing that one inhabits the ‘wrong body’ or the ‘wrong sex’. As Gayle Salamon reminds us, there is no question that the process of assuming a body and coming into possession of the “‘mine-ness’ of my body’ shows that ‘our bodily investments are undeniable’ (Salamon 2010: 42). Yet, as she adds in her critical engagement with Prosser’s book, it perhaps needs to be admitted that in a practical sense ‘the livability of one’s own embodiment’ involves individuals in the ‘always incomplete labor to reconfigure more than just the materialities of our own bodies’ (Salamon 2010: 42). It is not, she argues, that a fresh body part can completely resolve the transgender subject’s sense of the ‘mine-ness’ of the flesh. Instead, Salamon contends that one needs to take into account the ways in which bodies become ‘livable’ through desire, for oneself and for others. From this perspective, desire is the means that reveals to us that flesh is not ‘the stuff that forms’ bodies but the entity that we ‘form our bodies into’ – one that is neither exclusively material substance nor entirely a projected ideal (Salamon 2010: 64). In other words, flesh is the medium through which self and world extend into each other, in ways that unsettle the separation of subject and object, as well as distinctions between material and psychical realities.

Salamon counts among a number of contemporary theorists whose thinking draws on the phenomenology of French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–61). Merleau-Ponty’s extensive writings, especially *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) and *The Visible and the Invisible* (1964), have the potential to shift our understanding of what ‘sexuality’ might mean in relation to the

ways in which human subjects are corporeally situated in the world. Both of these innovative works, which give attention to the embodied nature of perception, have done much to break with the long-established and immensely influential dualism of mind and body associated with Descartes' *Discourse on Method* (1637). For Merleau-Ponty, desire is an active principle that connects individuals, ensuring that the flesh is not a bounded or separating entity. He therefore speaks of 'the flesh of the world': an 'intercorporeal' domain in which sight and touch enjoy transitivity with each and every thing that the embodied subject gives to and receives from (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 144). In *The Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty declares that sexuality might be thought of as an 'ambiguous atmosphere' that is 'co-extensive with life', whether in states of dreaming or waking; this 'ambiguous atmosphere' suffuses so much of our existence that it is impossible to localize its presence in a specific bodily part, psychical function or object-choice (Merleau-Ponty 2002: 196). Moreover, its co-extensive presence is such that it is at times hard for us to determine whether 'in a given decision or action, the proportion of sexual to other motivations' (Merleau-Ponty 2002: 196). Then again, this is not to say that sexuality is simply an 'atmosphere' that imbues all forms of experience for each and every human subject in a similar way. By combining insights from his earlier and later work, we can see that Merleau-Ponty stresses that each subject bears a particularized 'sexual schema' that may involve erogenous zones and pleasures that are not necessarily reducible to the genitals; this specific 'schema' configures the subject's unique history and shapes his or her 'intercorporeal' connectedness with the world (Merleau-Ponty 2002: 180).

These highly abstract ideas come into focus when Salamon points out that Merleau-Ponty provides a theory of sexuality that 'frustrates categorical summary; it means that neither sexual embodiment nor situatedness nor expression can be predicted by membership of any category of gender or sex' (Salamon 2010: 49). Thus it follows that, in her reading of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, Salamon concludes that he theorizes 'flesh' as 'neither matter nor mind' but as a 'region of being in which the subject is

not quite unitary and not quite the combination of two different things': mind *and* body, neither completely the same nor entirely different from each other (Salamon 2010: 65). In her view, Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on flesh as something that moves between, as well as exceeds, mental qualities and bodily materiality has great critical resonance for understanding transgender, which, as we can see from both the prefix *trans* and Feinberg's interest in pronouns such as 'hir', moves across and through accepted gender configurations. The upshot of Salamon's helpful analysis is that Merleau-Ponty's thinking enables us to see that 'an embodied response to desire is, through its radical particularity, unpredictable and impossible to map onto the morphology of the body' (Salamon 2010: 49). This is to say that while sexual embodiment may enjoy particularity through each subject's 'sexual schema', it cannot be reduced to typologies that assume that a specific body part (such as a penis), a psychical condition (such as neurosis), gendered style (for example, butch or femme), or the sexed object of desire that might be readily explained through bi-, homo-, hetero-, or, importantly, transsexuality.

Merleau-Ponty's assertion that sexuality is a subject's 'projected manner of being toward the world, that is, toward time and other men' has inspired recent theorists to consider, as Sara Ahmed does, the ways in which his ideas of 'bodily projection might help show how [sexual] orientations "exceed" the objects they are directed toward' (Ahmed 2007: 67). Ahmed's interest in Merleau-Ponty's concept of sexuality as corporeal 'projection' into the world lies in how it might throw light on the much-used but seldom investigated term 'sexual orientation'. 'It is', she writes, 'worth reflecting on the very term "sexual orientation"' because it assumes that sexuality is "'directed" in one way or another' toward same-sex or other-sex objects of desire (Ahmed 2007: 68). Ahmed's point is that theoretical works such as *The Phenomenology of Perception*, which has not traditionally been as prominent as sexological, psychoanalytic and Foucauldian writings in the study of sexuality, holds clues to ways in which 'sexuality is crucial to bodily orientation, to how we inhabit spaces' (Ahmed 2007: 67–68). Merleau-Ponty's insights therefore alert us not only to sexuality as a matter that involves the objects towards which we are orientated

but also the ways in which we extend our bodies into the world erotically (i.e. 'how one "faces" the world or is directed toward it') (Ahmed 2007: 68.). These contemplations of the spatial and temporal projections and orientations in a world that is mediated through the sensorium of the 'flesh' prompt larger thoughts about the manner in which our 'intercorporeal' condition enables deviations from the dominant 'straight' lines that are commonly assumed to characterize heterosexuality. Ahmed's valuable investigation of 'orientation' certainly encourages us to think carefully about routine cultural assumptions that designate dissident sexualities as those that either deviate from or pervert hegemonic temporal and spatial mappings of bodies and desires.

At the same time, however, one does not necessarily need phenomenology to discuss cultural, social and political ways of organizing sexuality in temporal and spatial terms. Since the 1990s, it has not been uncommon for queer theorists to remind us that non-normative sexualities inhabit public and social spaces in ways that defy cultural and social imperatives to be 'straight'. One can see this development in Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner's writing when they address the ways in which 'contemporary heteronormative culture' seeks to render itself not only intelligible but authoritative 'through the ideologies of and institutions of intimacy' that assign sexuality to the private sphere, thus making forms of 'sex in public', such as nightclubs, sex clubs, and other venues of sexual sociability, 'appear like matter out of place' (Berlant and Warner 2002: 194, 192–93). In particular, they argue that 'heteronormativity', a term they align with 'heterosexual culture' but do not conflate with other-sex desire, serves to regulate oppressive and exclusive ideas about the proper practices and spheres in which eroticism should be experienced and expressed:

Community is imagined through scenes of intimacy, coupling, and kinship. And a historical relation to futurity is restricted to generational narrative and reproduction. A whole field of social relations becomes intelligible as heterosexuality, and this privatized sexual culture bestows on its sexual practices a tacit sense of rightness and normalcy. The sense of rightness – embedded in things and not just

in sex – is what we call heteronormativity. Heteronormativity is more than ideology or prejudice, or phobia against gays and lesbians, it is produced in almost every aspect of the forms and arrangements of social life: nationality, the state, and the law; commerce; medicine; education; plus the conventions and affects of narrativity, romance, and other protected spaces of culture.

(Berlant and Warner 2002: 194)

Given the influence of this discussion of heteronormativity, it is not surprising that other queer theorists, such as Lee Edelman, have followed Berlant and Warner's lead to protest against the 'straight' model of not just space but also time. In his much-cited study, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004), Edelman objects to the coercive ways in which straight culture seeks to impose a 'compulsory narrative of reproductive futurism' (Edelman 2004: 21). This heteronormative emphasis on what some writers have called 'reprosexual' imperatives is for Edelman most identifiable in the figure of the innocent, always-to-be-protected child, who is supposed to be eternally threatened, especially in the minds of groups that condemn sexual deviants and abortionists. 'The Child', Edelman writes of this sacrosanct cultural icon, 'marks the fetishistic fixation of heteronormativity' (Edelman 2004: 21). Meanwhile, the queer, from Edelman's psychoanalytic viewpoint, is the figure that embodies the 'death drive' that was first theorized in Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. This is the drive that 'dismantles the subject from within' as a force of 'negativity opposed to every form of social viability' (Edelman 2004: 9). Such formulations correlate queerness with refusals to follow developmental or vertical lines and patterns of growth and maturity, to adhere to temporalities that live in fear of the termination of the foetus, and to reproduce future generations at the expense of taking pleasure in one's sexual life in the here and now.

From such non-compliant critical perspectives as Warner's and Edelman's, it is perhaps not surprising that same-sex marriage, which has been legitimated in some European nations and American states, while voted down in others (as in the passing of California's Proposition 8 ballot in November 2008), looks

undesirable. In Warner's view, the 'definition of marriage ... already includes so many layers of history, and so many norms, that gay marriage is not likely to alter it fundamentally, and any changes that it does bring may well be regressive' (Warner 1999: 129). Tim Dean puts the point in a comparable idiom: 'Universalizing marriage serves the enterprise of social regulation by homogenizing relational recognition' (Dean 2009: 96). Queer critics of these positions might contend that they sound somewhat fatalistic, as if 'straight' time had already passed final judgment on what marriage could and should mean. One might have thought that some of Foucault's memorable observations about normalization might have suggested that it is mistaken to think that 'heteronormativity' enjoyed such enduring 'omni-circulating' authority over marriage. 'The norm', Foucault writes, 'lays claim to power' whose 'function is not to exclude or reject'; instead, the norm 'is linked to a positive technique of intervention and transformation, to a sort of normative project' (Foucault 2003: 50). Is it really the case that queer theory must view marriage as an institution that will inevitably reproduce the privatization of desire at the expense of public sexual freedoms? Is marriage, regardless of whether it is conferred on other-sex, same-sex or plural partners, predestined to repress or restrict insubordinate sexualities?

Tom Boellstorff, for example, has critiqued Warner's standpoint on same-sex marriage by suggesting that there is something uncannily 'straight' in such apparently queer reasoning. Boellstorff claims that Warner's unwillingness to countenance the idea that same-sex marriage in particular might transform aspects of marriage in general ironically involves thinking about marriage in 'straight time': a 'millenarian temporality' that is '[e]volutive, teleological, apocalyptic, paranoid', driven, it seems, by a fear that heteronormativity has so much power that it has already won the battle over the cultural and political meanings of marriage (Boellstorff 2007: 233, 231). Boellstorff, in other words, wishes to show that Warner's analysis is not so much a rebuttal of 'straight time' as complicit with its self-satisfying trajectories of inevitability.

Perhaps one of the main problems in differentiating 'straight' and 'queer' time is that the very process of making such a distinction tends to endorse some of the assumptions embedded in the

normativity that it seeks to contest. Boellstorff suggests that the issue of same-sex marriage might make different sense if we understood 'queer' time not along some linear trajectory in which 'straight time' dictates what is legitimate and what it not. Instead, the queering of time might benefit from inquiring into alternative temporalities such as 'coincidental time' that we recognize most commonly in dates such as Friday the 13th. In Boellstorff's view, 'coincidental time' does not adhere to linear trajectories or accumulating cycles. By contrast, 'coincidental time' occurs punctually not durationally; even if Friday the 13th is shrouded in popular suspicions, its occurrence does not build incrementally toward the apocalypse. As Boellstorff observes, this alternative temporal modality 'inheres ... in coincidence, intersection, admixture, in what we could term queer moments' (Boellstorff 2007: 239). He contends that through its unsettling coincidence with 'straight time', same-sex marriage does not necessarily become assimilated to the 'metaphysics of apocalypse' that reactionaries uphold in preserving their exclusive rights over an institution that they regard as the sole property of child-bearing heterosexual couples (Boellstorff 2007: 242). To the contrary, his line of inquiry implies that same-sex marriage can betoken not so much an assimilationist desire to be 'virtually normal' (as right-wing gay thinker, Andrew Sullivan [1995], would have it) as an insurgent desire for legitimated intimacy that can potentially transform, re-imagine or de-normalize the institution from which it has traditionally been excluded.

The polemics about the pros and cons of same-sex marriage belong to a series of recent debates about the ways in which non-normative sexualities have developed alternative forms of family, intimacy and kinship. In his contentious study of gay male barebacking subcultures (i.e. the social networks, spaces and venues through which men can enjoy unprotected sex with other men), Dean makes a vital observation about developments among queer people during the mid-1980s in San Francisco, the city that has arguably been at the forefront of transformations in the ways in which we think about such phenomena as 'families of choice', maintaining sexual health in an epidemic, and campaigning for the right of same-sex couples to marry. Dean recognizes that in

San Francisco during this transformative period lesbians and gay men 'intuited connections between the "gayby" boom and AIDS' (Dean 2009: 90). He maintains that '[w]hat both the epidemic and the experiments with alternative families made apparent were the various ways that people could become related to each other by blood without involving heterosexuality' (Dean 2009: 90). This is a powerful observation that forces attention on the ways in which patterns of queer sociability and family connectedness have challenged the idea that biological consanguinity is the exclusive bond that legitimates relations of kinship in the West.

Dean extends this idea of queer desires for alternative forms of intimacy to practices of cruising that have often been strongly stigmatized as the worst face of gay male promiscuity. Since many commentators have charged that barebacking, more than many other sexual practices, amounts to the most irresponsible sexual behaviour imaginable, it is striking to see the ways that Dean takes seriously the idea that cruising involves a 'pleasure of risk' that 'is not identical to that of unprotected sex, although barebacking', which might be one result of such sexual encounters, 'gives physical form to what should be understood as an ethical disposition to the vulnerability to the other' (Dean 2009: 210). He views the forms of intimacy achieved through this kind of sexual contact between men as not just about 'hunting for sex but opening oneself to the world' (Dean 2009: 210). From this perspective, cruising performs an exemplary aimlessness that enables intimate contact with strangers without having to identify with them, possess them or seek to know them. In other words, cruising, which involves the 'pleasure and satisfaction of risking the self', encapsulates a decidedly queer ethic that respects the fact that the strangers with whom one has sex remain intimately understood as strangers, figures of desire that share erotic pleasures before moving on to enjoy further realms of 'unlimited intimacy' (Dean 2009: 210, 211). More to the point, Dean extrapolates this ethic of cruising 'as a way of life that remains irreducible to sexual cruising' (Dean 2009: 211). In other words, cruising provides an exemplary ethical mode of being that respects but does not in any way contain, inhibit or subject the strangers whom we encounter.

Dean's line of thinking accentuates several controversial shifts that have taken place in the study of sexuality as an ineradicable component in our twenty-first century lives. His bold discussion urges us to think wisely about the manner in which sexuality, as a theoretical concept, a set of embodied practices, and a psychic reality, might be at its most ethical when it engages with intense pleasures that entail hard-to-predict measures of risk, not just for oneself but of course for the strangers with whom one experiences intimacy. Yet he goes one step further by suggesting that the willingness to remain open to the other enables everyone ('whether, gay, straight, or otherwise') to 'undertake relational experiments' that may or may not be sexual but will indeed enable closeness (Dean 2009: 197). To be sure, his theoretical standpoint may sound somewhat idealistic. (Not all encounters with strangers, as Dean surely acknowledges, are likely to be joyful, rewarding or satisfying. That, it seems, is part of the risk.) Yet this stress on 'risking the self by opening to it to alterity' is one of the vital outcomes of his analysis (Dean 2009: 210). His argument, like much queer thought, runs against the logic of commonsensical and judgemental commentaries that continue to see sexuality, especially in its most promiscuous forms, as a pernicious, hazardous and pathological presence that maintains an unrivalled capacity to corrupt, deprave or pervert us.

GLOBAL SEXUALITIES

The increasing queer emphasis on the ethics of remaining open to others can be seen in parallel developments in scholarly thought that inquire into the meanings of sexuality within contexts that lie beyond the Western ones in which debates about sexual identity have frequently originated. Since the 1990s there have been numerous critical and historical studies of sexual cultures in non-Western locations; these analyses have done much to transform the ways in which sexuality might be understood within parts of the world in which the vocabularies imported from sexuality, psychoanalysis, Foucauldian, LGBT and queer thought have not always been either intelligible or relevant. In this concluding section of *Sexuality*, I want to look briefly at the ways in

which scholars of non-Western cultures have both employed and questioned theoretically familiar categories of sex, gender and sexuality when analysing identities and practices within Asian, diasporic and indigenous communities.

One of the main topics to arise in critical discussions of the ways in which sexuality is comprehended in non-Western contexts relates to processes of globalization: a word that has its origins in the mid-twentieth century. Globalization has increasingly come to mean the mechanisms through which national cultures, economies and political structures (among many other things) are absorbed, modified and moulded by international processes, whether in the form of foreign investment, commerce and trade, migrating populations or the spread of technology. Much has been written about the ways in which assumptions about sexuality have participated in the flows of an internationalized world whose characteristic emphasis on private property ownership, deregulated markets and minimal state intervention has become generally known as neoliberalism. Political geographer David Harvey provides a crisp definition of this much-used term: 'Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade' (Harvey 2005: 2). Since sexuality as a concept emerged and developed within much the same moment as economic understandings of 'corporate giants' dominating the globe, it follows that critics working in a range of disciplinary fields have inquired into the ways in which Western ideas about sexual identity, especially lesbian and gay identities, have been exported from the West, only to be reshaped and rethought in non-Western locations. At the same time, students of sexual diasporas have shown that communities migrating to the West have both retained and transformed the erotic categories and identities that have travelled with them.

The memorable concept of 'global sex' is most closely associated with the research of Australian anthropologist Dennis Altman, whose 2001 book of that title followed his much-discussed article, 'Global Gaze/Global Gays' (1997). In this essay, Altman sets

out to analyse 'the emergence of western-style politicized homosexuality in Asia' (Altman 1997: 417). He assumes that the universality that he sees in the Asian adoption of 'lesbian' and 'gay' identities is synonymous with processes of globalization. As an anthropologist, Altman is necessarily sensitive to his outsider position as a white Westerner whose research relies on his interaction with informants from cultures to which he does not belong. Moreover, he recognizes that his inquiries involve looking closely at the ways in which Asian men and women who adapt gay and lesbian identities, respectively, must 'balance the impact of universalizing rhetoric and styles with the continuing existence of cultural and social traditions' (Altman 1997: 420). Yet the tendency of his argument is to see Asian manifestations of lesbian and gay subjectivities in the 1990s as a historical repetition of the shaping of those identities in the West twenty to thirty years earlier, as if the one formed an unmistakable resemblance with the other:

In much of urban Asia it is easy to see parallels with the West of several decades ago: existing ideas of male homosexuals as would-be women are being replaced by the assertion of new self-concepts; more men are attracted to the idea of primary homosexual relationships, rather than marrying and engaging in 'homosex' on the side; there is a development of more commercial venues (but simultaneously, perhaps, there is less public cruising as being 'gay' makes homosexuality more specialized); in both organizations and media there is the emergence of a gay political consciousness.

(Altman 1997: 423)

Altman's generalizing tone discloses several assumptions about his understanding of the 'global' movement of 'new self-concepts' about sexuality. First, he suggests that modern homosexual identities are readily reproducible through global flows that move in one direction, historically and geographically, from West to East. Second, in his view the modern sexualities that migrate to Asia appear to do so intact, which means that they undergo little change or modification in the process of transplantation. Third, the large concept of Asia, like that of the West, remains in his

analysis subject to hardly any differentiation. Even though Altman talks principally of 'urban Asia', he contends that all of his urban examples – Bangkok, Jakarta, Hong Kong, Manila and Seoul – have 'similarities which seem important and ... more to do with common urban and ideological pressures' that override those of specific 'cultural tradition' (Altman 1997: 424). Implicitly, these 'common urban and ideological pressures' have much to do with processes of Westernization, which for Altman appear to be similar, if not identical, to his vision of globalization as a universalizing phenomenon in which Asian subjects can at last realize their lesbian and gay selves. The idea that queer Asian constituencies might not assume that Western models of sexual identity are universal is secondary in 'Global Gaze/Global Gays'. Instead, Altman indicates that the West has produced the 'universal', modern and politicized lesbian and gay identities that he recognizes in a diverse range of urban Asian centres.

Not surprisingly, Altman's line of argument has generated much debate among anthropologists who study Asian cultures. Lisa Rofel, in her study of neoliberalism, sexuality and modern China, claims that Altman's position derives from 'colonial anthropology', and she goes so far as to suggest that he maintains a 'notion of culture as timeless, bounded, homogeneous, and unchanging' (Rofel 2007: 91). Even though Rofel is the last to deny that 'the coming into existence in recent years to gay identifications or gay liberation ... extend[s] beyond national and cultural borders', she adds that her study of cosmopolitan life in Beijing presents neither an account of a 'cultural logic of absolute difference' from the West nor a portrayal of the 'universalism of Euro-American notions of what it means to be gay' (Rofel 2007: 92). In response to Altman's assumptions about the Western exportation of gay identity to Asia, Rofel poses several questions about 'what it meant to be gay in 1990s China'. To begin with, she acknowledges that during this period gay identity in Beijing was clearly connected with 'crossing cultural and national borders' (Rofel 2007: 94). Yet the inquiries that most pressingly emerge from her study relate to the reasons why men and women in China have sought out ideas about gayness from other places: 'What', Rofel asks, 'has allowed gayness to emerge visibly in

China that cannot be reduced to the presumably inexorable power of global flows of images and ideas?' (Rofel 2007: 94). In her view, the answer lies in the concept 'cultural citizenship', which means not just a sense of political rights but also a sense of affinity through and within Chinese culture (Rofel 2007: 94). Her argument is that in post-socialist China of the 1990s there was an urgent debate about the ways in which 'human nature – whether the human nature of the neoliberal free-market economy or of gender traditionalism – has emerged to find its freedom of expression' (Rofel 2007: 95). In other words, the urban, cosmopolitan men and women who were attracted to Western lesbian and gay identities were participating in a broad but distinctively Chinese cultural debate about the freedom to express highly contested and varying ideas about 'human nature'. Sexuality, as Rofel says, was one of the categories through which this manifestly national debate about cultural citizenship, which extended to Hong Kong, Taiwan and members of the Chinese diaspora in South-East Asia, could be meaningfully articulated in the neoliberal era. Rofel's discussion therefore looks at the manner in which the particularities of the national context at this time provided the basis for men and women to explore Chinese perspectives on 'human nature' in relation to modern Western concepts of sexual identity.

By comparison, Boellstorff, in his study of '*lesbi*' and '*gay*' identities in 1990s Indonesia, draws attention to the ways in which they are 'founded on rhetorics of national belonging based upon the figure of the heterosexual nuclear family' (Boellstorff 2005: 7). As he points out, both '*lesbi*' and '*gay*', even if evidently derived from the English language, have specific currency within Indonesia that is not in any respect symmetrical with the meanings attached to them in the West. Boellstorff's researches therefore depart radically from Altman's assertions about 'the impact of universalizing rhetoric and styles' of homosexual identity in urban Asian settings. In one of the many interviews he reproduces, Boellstorff looks closely at the complicated manner in which his informant, Hasan, who resided in the city of Makassar, talks about the moment when he recognized he was '*gay*': 'I saw on the "world news," there it showed a gay demonstration. And according to

the information there ... the people who were demonstrating, um, wanted the government to accept the marriage with men. And that made me confused. Why was it like that? That's when I was in high school' (Boellstorff 2005: 67). When Boellstorff asks Hasan about his reactions to witnessing this gay demonstration on television, he receives the following response: 'I felt that an event like that could only happen outside; that in Indonesia there wasn't anything like that' (Boellstorff 2005: 67).

In his analysis of this interview, Boellstorff points out that it might initially appear that Hasan's witnessing of modern gay identity through mass media provides a clear example of 'globalization' that shapes Indonesian understandings of what it means to be 'gay'. Yet, in his view, there are several elements in Hasan's response that warrant close attention: (1) the idea that sexuality is related to mass media; (2) the way in which an 'outside' form of sexual identity becomes recognizable in an intimate or personal manner; and (3) the border that divides 'gay' culture from other cultures is understood as national. Boellstorff's point is that since '*lesbi*' and 'gay' subject positions are not passed down through the family in Indonesia, they are necessarily acquired from the 'outside' (which, in Hasan's case, is a representation of a televised gay demonstration in the West), and they are subjected to investigation in national television programmes and press reports. In the process of their Indonesian reception, however, these sexual identities undergo transformation, not least because mass media coverage of same-sex desire comprises a disjointed set of affirmative and negative depictions of Western gay men and lesbians, some of which relate to celebrities, debates about sexual health or political movements:

From their beginnings to the present, these media have 'exposed' not a fully articulated discourse of homosexuality, but a series of incomplete and contradictory references, in translation, sometimes openly denigrating and hostile. It is not a transmission of self-understanding so much as a set of cultural logics reconfigured within Indonesia. Yet from 'translations' of this intermittent reportage come subjectivities by which myriad Indonesians live out their lives.

(Boellstorff 2005: 77–78)

Such 'translations', which involve complicated mediations of sexual understandings from one hemisphere to another, defy the idea that there is an automatic correspondence between Western comprehensions of 'gay' and the Indonesian adaptation of the similar-sounding but differentiable term *'gay'*.

Elizabeth Povinelli makes similar observations in her study of Aboriginal people based at Belyuen, Australia. Povinelli records that during her field work a debate that took place among a group of women 'about the meaning of marriage, kinship, and sexuality' involved making references to both mass media and 'local and translocal discourses', which included 'the sexual proclivity of various ancestral sites, the ongoing drama of *Will and Grace* [NBC, 1998–2006] broadcast on the local television channels, the coverage of white paedophiles in the Murdoch-owned newspaper' and 'the drinking parties that crisscross Aboriginal communities in which reggae, hip hop and *wangga* [regional song and dance] are combined' (Povinelli 2006: 71). Very clearly, Belyuen is a location where indigenous traditions and Western press and television intermesh in ways that show that the local and global remain in constant dialogue with each other. Povinelli's conclusions can be compared to Martin Manalansan IV's discussion of Filipino gay immigration to New York City. Manalansan looks at the intricate manner in which 'processes of globalization and transnationalism' are negotiated through his subjects' understandings of 'hegemonic American/Western and Filipino/Southeast Asian sexual gender ideologies' (Manalansan 2003: 8, 16). As Manalansan points out, his subjects frequently had to negotiate distinctions between Western concepts of 'gay' identity and Filipino understandings of *'bakla'* ('the Tagalog term that encompasses homosexuality, hermaphroditism, cross-dressing, and effeminacy'; Manalansan 2003: ix). Consequently, his research reveals that the circulation of modern sexual identities among people who have moved from East to West does not result in 'creating generic "McDonalized" lives but rather intricately woven lives that are at once global and local' (Manalansan 2003: 9).

In the end, these examples from the field of anthropology show that the erotic identities that the West has habitually attached to the term sexuality, whose modern origins date from the late

nineteenth century, continue to travel around the world in transformational ways. Taken together, this powerful body of research on Chinese, Indonesian, Aboriginal and Filipino lives reveals that, although sexuality had indeed been globalized, its meanings hardly signify identically from one local or national context to another. Such changes are surely welcome when we consider that from its earliest beginnings the discussion of sexuality involved inventing types and producing pathologies. But, as I hope to have shown in this book, the traditional tendency to find strict classifications for kinds of sexuality has hardly gone unchallenged. Yet even if, as we enter the second decade of the twenty-first century, we recognize that sexuality is a modern category that requires considerable demystification, it is still the case that it signifies very powerful energies, pleasures and satisfactions that remain intensely meaningful in our lives. No matter how much theorists might feel inclined to treat the word with suspicion, we have not yet reached the point where we can do without sexuality: a highly charged term that will doubtless undergo further redefinition in our unfolding critical idiom.

Glossary

Androgyny The term combines the Greek words *άνδρας* (andras: man) and *γυνή* (gyné: woman) to define either an individual's manifestation of doubly gendered characteristics (masculine and feminine) or gender-neutral appearance (neither masculine nor feminine). The word identifies expressions of gender identity that either exceed or contest normative conceptions of masculinity or femininity.

Barebacking Unprotected anal sex, usually between male partners.

Biopower A term devised by Michael Foucault (see pp. 157–58) to describe modern institutional techniques and practices for subjugating specific kinds of bodies; Foucault observes that some bodies have been subjected to biopower because they have been deemed to manifest excessive sexuality.

Bisexual Used as either an adjective or noun, bisexual refers to individuals who are attracted to members of both sexes. The term has its origins in sexological writings of the 1890s, and it has enjoyed broad circulation since the 1950s.

Boi The meaning of this recently used word has broad and variable meanings, usually relating to types of sexual youthfulness, which depend on the precise erotic or sexual context in which the term arises. Within LGBT (see later) communities, it can refer to: (1) younger women who express androgyny, transgender or gender queer characteristics; and (2) sexually submissive men who take pleasure in sadomasochistic role play.

Bottom As a noun, bottom alludes to the partner who performs a passive role in sexual intimacy; such passivity, however, need not be conflated with powerlessness. Cf. top (see later).

Butch Often associated with lesbian communities, butch refers to types of female masculinity; in the United States, its origins date from the 1940s. The term, whether employed as an adjective or noun, can also be used to define styles of hyper-masculinity among gay men.

Camp The term derives from French slang, '*se camper*', which means to pose in an exaggerated manner. Used as both adjective and noun, by the mid-twentieth century camp was associated among homosexuals in particular with cultural behaviours or styles that seemed ironically over-the-top, flagrantly kitschy and amusingly outdated.

Castration complex This is a key Freudian theory that affects boys and girls differently. For boys, it defines a turning-point in their psychic lives when they shift from believing that all human beings have a penis to the recognition that women have had their penises removed. As a consequence, boys fear that their fathers will castrate them if they continue to desire their mothers. At this point of their development, boys exit from the Oedipus complex (see later). For girls, the castration complex involves resentment towards their mothers because of the psychic loss of the penis. As a result, girls turn their desires away from their mothers towards their fathers: a process that inaugurates their entry into the Oedipus complex.

Cathexis Deriving from the earliest English translations of Freud's works, the term identifies psychical energies that become attached to an object or idea.

Constructionism Sometimes referred to as social constructionism, this sociological term developed in the 1960s to define the ways in which communities transform social phenomena into objective reality. In relation to sexuality, constructionism has involved analyses that question ideas about the essential truth or objective reality of specific sexual identities and preferences. The word is usually opposed to essentialism (see later).

Cruising Originating in male homosexual subcultures during the mid-twentieth century, cruising defines the activity of pursuing anonymous sexual encounters in public spaces.

Death drive First articulated in Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), the death drive defines the organism's desire to achieve an inorganic state, which involves undoing connections and destroying things. Lacan, who returned on many occasions to the meanings of this psychic phenomenon, argues that the death drive characterizes almost every drive in its wish to pursue its own extinction and experience suffering instead of pleasure.

- Degeneration** Adapted from the differing evolutionary theories of Charles Darwin and Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, degeneration enjoyed popularity during the Victorian *fin de siècle* when it advanced the idea that criminal, pathological and sexually deviant individuals were symptoms of a society that was regressing socially and politically. During the late Victorian period, the term is mostly closely associated with Max Nordau's best-selling study, *Degeneration* (1892).
- Discourse** In studies of the history of sexuality, this term is closely linked with the work of Michael Foucault (see pp. 152–77), whose influential discussion of discursive formations shows that ways in which erotic desires and sexual identities are regulated through the terms and classifications that institutions employ to define them.
- Drag** Dating from the twentieth century, this term refers to practices of cross-dressing that are often connected, though by no means limited, to homosexual subcultures.
- Drives** In psychoanalytic theory from Freud onward, drives refer to psychological energies that cannot be satisfied. Freud distinguishes drives from the biologically based instincts.
- Ego** This Freudian term defines the psychic mechanism that enables the human subject to operate in the world by pleasing the desires of the id, with which it is intimately connected. Deriving from the early 1920s, Freud's theorization of ego belongs to his three parts of the psychic apparatus, which also includes the id and the superego (see later).
- Essentialism** In studies of the history of sexuality, essentialism is usually opposed to constructionism. The term focuses attention on the belief that sexual identities and behaviours are timeless or transhistorical because they possess innate and unchanging characteristic or properties that are rooted in biology and heredity.
- Femme** Mainly connected with lesbian communities, femme defines feminine women-loving women. The term can be extended to refer to feminine gender presentation among men.
- Fetishism** The term fetish, which has its origins in eighteenth-century studies of 'primitive' peoples, has since the time of Richard von Krafft-Ebing (see pp. 24–31) been used to describe (often inanimate) objects that give individuals sexual pleasure. Freud theorized that fetishism

substituted for the fears that boys attached to the castration complex (see earlier).

FTM (also F2M or FtM) The acronym stands for female to male. The term is associated with transgender communities in which an individual is transitioning or has transitioned from female to male, often with the aid of surgical intervention. Cf. MTF and transsexual (see later).

Gay Used either as adjective or noun, the term gay generally refers to homosexual men, although on occasion the word is employed to signify gay women (cf. lesbian, below). By the 1960s, sexual liberationists preferred it to the sexological term homosexual (see later), which in their view had pathological connotations. The Gay Liberation Movement of this period grew out of this politicized adoption of the term. The modern understanding of gay as a word that defines same-sex desire appears to derive from the earlier part of the twentieth century, though its sexual connotations were linked with prostitution in the mid-nineteenth century.

Gender Gender defines the ways in which masculinity and femininity enshrine the characteristics that culture and society expect to be modelled on male and female bodies, respectively. The term is usually made distinct from sex (see later) in relation to the anatomical difference between male and female.

Gender performance First theorized by Judith Butler (see pp. 192–93), this influential term articulates the idea that all manifestations of gender (see earlier) involve the subject's continual efforts to present styles of masculinity or femininity to the world. The concept of gender performance reveals that masculinity and femininity need not be based on a male or female body, respectively.

Genderqueer This is a recent term that defines individuals who contest or reject the binary opposition between masculinity and femininity by devising alternative or queer forms of gender presentation.

Hermaphroditism This is the physiological condition in which an individual possesses both male and female reproductive organs.

Heteronormative This term, advanced by Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner (see pp. 210–12), identifies the cultural, social and political institutions that assume that the most desirable forms of intimacy

and kinship are based on monogamous intimacy between a man and a woman who will in turn strive to reproduce this norm through the regulative institution of the heterosexual family.

Heterosexual Used as either adjective or noun, the word heterosexual means an individual who is attracted to people of the opposite sex. Dating from sexological research carried out during the late nineteenth century, the term, which combines the Greek word *ἕτερος* and the Latin stem *sexus*, is usually opposed to 'homosexual' (see later).

Homonormative Derived from 'heteronormative' (see earlier), this term defines attitudes and behaviours among homosexual men and women that duplicate ideals of monogamous intimacy associated with the heterosexual family. The term also extends to reactionary cultural and racial perspectives among lesbians and gay men who are thought to uphold traditional institutions, such as marriage.

Homophobia Homophobia is the pathological hatred of homosexuality.

Homosexual Used as either adjective or noun, the term homosexual means an individual who is attracted to people of the same sex. Dating from sexological research carried out during the late nineteenth century, the term, which combines the Greek word *ὁμός* and the Latin stem *sexus*, is usually opposed to 'heterosexual' (see earlier).

Homosocial This adjective, which relates to the noun homosociality, is mainly connected with the literary criticism of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (see pp. 183–84). Sedgwick identifies the close social bonds that men secure with one another in order to maintain patriarchal dominance over women. In Sedgwick's analysis, the patriarchal authority embodied in male homosocial relations maintains its power by exerting two forms of oppression: misogyny and homophobia. Sedgwick contends that in modern culture the social intimacy encouraged through homosocial relations must be carefully policed unless it manifests any element of eroticism between men.

Id One of the three parts of Freud's psychic apparatus, the id defines the mass of undifferentiated drives that seeks pleasure and avoids pain. Developmentally, the id precedes the ego (see earlier), with which it

remains intimately connected, and it operates in contradiction to the superego (see later).

Imaginary One of Lacan's three psychoanalytical topoi, the Imaginary relates to the formation of what Freud calls the ego (see earlier) during the *stade du miroir* (or mirror stage) (see pp. 77–79). The Imaginary defines the realm in which the subject identifies itself as a subject by recognizing itself in a specular image, such as its reflection in a mirror. Lacan's term serves to show that such self-identification is an imaginary projection or surface appearance. The Imaginary is structured by the Symbolic (see later). Together, the Imaginary and Symbolic enable the subject to fend off the domain that Lacan calls the Real (see later).

Intersexual The adjective intersexual, together with the word intersex, defines individuals whose sexual attributes cannot be readily assigned to male or female, whether in relation to the genitals or gendered characteristics. Furthermore, the term can refer to individuals who choose not to be categorized according to conventional understandings of masculinity or femininity. Cf. androgyny and hermaphroditism (see earlier).

Lesbian Used as either a noun or adjective, the term, which refers to women who love women, derives from Lesbos, home of the sixth-century BCE Greek poet, Sappho, whose lyrics celebrating her desire for women were admired by succeeding generations. The *Oxford English Dictionary* suggests that the modern sexual usage of lesbian dates from 1890, although historians have discovered examples from the previous century.

LGBT, LGBTQ and LGBTQI Since the 1990s, these acronyms have been widely used to abbreviate 'Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender', 'Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer' and 'Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersexual'. There has been much debate about the awkwardness of these runs of initials, which have been used widely in defining specific fields of academic study and activist campaigns among sexual minorities (see pages 197–209).

Libido Derived from the Latin word for lust, this psychoanalytical term, which is mostly associated with Freud's work, refers to sexual energy informing the instincts and drives.

MTF (also M2F or MtF) The acronym stands for male to female. The term is associated with transgender communities in which an individual is transitioning or has transitioned from male to female, often with the aid of surgical intervention. Cf. FTM (see earlier) and transsexual (see later).

Oedipus complex Based on Freud's adaptation of the tragic story of Oedipus, who unwittingly kills his father, Laius, and marries his mother, Jocasta, this complex affects boys and girls differently in their psycho-sexual development. For boys, the Oedipus complex relates to the ways in which they resolve the earliest sexual desire for the mother and the hatred towards the father as a sexual rival. By overcoming the castration complex (see earlier), boys eventually identify with the father's desire for women and project their desires not onto the mother but other women. In other words, the resolution of this complex results in adult male heterosexual desire. For girls, the castration complex ushers them into the Oedipus complex, where they identify with the mother's loss of the penis. Girls, according to this model, tend to linger in the Oedipus complex where they sometimes are eventually able to renounce the loss of the penis by substituting their phantasmatic wish to have a baby as a gift from their fathers. Freud's theorization of the shaping of femininity through the castration complex has been subject to much controversial debate, especially among feminist thinkers (see pp. 69–76).

Perversion In the history of sexuality, the use of the word perversion to describe homosexual individuals and behaviours dates from the late nineteenth century. The term was current until the mid-twentieth century, when its usage became increasingly offensive.

Phallocentrism Dating from the 1970s, this word derives from psycho-analytical applications of the adjective phallocentric that draw attention to attitudes or theories that are either male-centred or based on the symbolic potency of the phallus.

Queer In the late nineteenth century, this term, whether used as adjective or noun, referred in a derogatory manner to homosexuals. By the 1980s, activists resignified the word so that it became a defiant statement of sexual insubordination. More recently, the term has

been employed more generally to embrace sexual minorities that defy the authority and assumptions of heteronormative culture (see pp. 179–215).

Real Together with the Imaginary and the Symbolic, the Real forms part of Lacan's three psychoanalytical topoi. The Real, which Lacan developed conceptually in the 1950s, marks the domain that exists outside language and resists all symbolization (see pp. 83–84).

Repression In Freud's psychoanalytical researches, repression defines the involuntary removal of intense wishes and impulses into the realm of the unconscious (see later).

Reverse discourse In Foucault's introduction to *The History of Sexuality*, he suggests that sexual minorities established their claims to particular identities and rights on the basis of the sexological discourses that labelled their sexual deviancy in relation to categories such as homosexual and invert. Such minorities put the dominant discourse into reverse by using it for their own purposes. The historical accuracy of Foucault's claims has been contested.

Sadomasochism Often abbreviated as SM, the term defines sexual role play that involves the staging of scenes of bondage, domination and submission that intensify experiences of pleasure and pain.

Sex Although the word can refer to sexual intercourse, it also defines the distinction between the male and female sexes. Most thinkers who write on sexuality like to ensure that they make clear distinctions between categories of sex and gender (see earlier).

Sex/gender system This system defines the ways in which categories of sex and gender serve to reinforce each other in societies, most often by assuming that sex and gender are seamlessly linked – so that femininity appears to be the natural property of female bodies and masculinity the natural property of male bodies.

Sexology Dating from the turn of the twentieth century, sexology refers to the critical and scientific study of sexual behaviour and sexual identity in modern culture and society.

Sexual inversion Early sexologists in the 1890s used sexual inversion to define their belief that homosexuality was based on an inside-out confusion of the sexed body and its gendered attributes. Inversion implies that the male homosexual has a female soul (or gender)

within a male body, while the female homosexual has a male soul (or gender) within a female body. Sexologists who were invested in this theory took pains to differentiate between gradations and types of sexual invert. In recent years, historians have suggested that the theorization of sexual inversion has considerable relevance to our understanding of the recent emergence of transgender as a sexual identity and critical term (see pp. 20–24 and below).

Straight Straight, which can be used as either an adjective or noun, is a byword for heterosexual (see earlier).

Symbolic One of the Lacan's three topoi, which include the Imaginary and the Real (see earlier), the Symbolic is the fluctuating field of signification in which human subjects have access to the pronoun 'I'. Within the Symbolic, however, the anchoring of the subject's identity remains precarious because the 'I' is accessible to anyone. Although the subject seeks to locate its self-image within the Imaginary, the Symbolic – as the domain in which signification is structured – constantly besieges and threatens to undo the subject that strives to recreate his or her own stable self-image (see p. 83).

Superego Together with the ego and the id, the superego forms one of the three parts of Freud's psychic apparatus. The superego defines what Freud sometimes calls the ego ideals that create the subject's conscience. As a result, the term superego is often thought to characterize the psychic mechanism of self-censorship that prevents or inhibits the expression of specific desires and wishes.

Third gender Third gender was often known until recently as third sex. The term refers to individuals whose sexual identity does not conform to either male or female but exists instead as an alternative to both. The term bears comparison with words that address degrees of gender non-conformity, including androgyny (see earlier), intersexual (see earlier) and transgender (see later). Third gender needs to be separated conceptually from hermaphroditism (see earlier).

Top As a noun, top alludes to the partner who performs an active role in sexual intimacy; such activity, however, need not be conflated with absolute power. Cf. bottom (see earlier).

Transgender Although the *Oxford English Dictionary* observes that transgender has been in use by specialists since the 1970s, the term,

which can serve as either an adjective or noun, circulated so broadly in the 1990s that it came to define a particular sexual minority. The term defines individuals whose gender presentation differs from conventional cultural expectations of the ways in which masculinity and femininity are supposed to relate directly to male bodies and female bodies, respectively. Transgender needs to be differentiated from transsexual (see later).

Transsexual Dating from the mid-twentieth century, transsexual, which can be used as either an adjective or noun, refers to individuals who wish to transition to the other sex. The term is not the same as transgender (see earlier). Cf. FTM and MTF (see earlier).

Unconscious Theorized by Freud, the unconscious is the psychic repository into which the subject involuntarily represses unacceptable wishes and desires. Freud believed that the operations of the unconscious were evident through symptoms, such as slips of the tongue. He also developed techniques in interpreting the workings of this psychic domain through analyzing his patients' recollections of their dreams.

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Index

- Ackerley, J.R. 4
 ACT UP *see* Aids Coalition to Unleash Power
The Advocate 168
 Ahmed, Sara 209–10
 AIDS: epidemic 35; homophobia 182–83, 194, 214
 Aids Coalition to Unleash Power 194
Aids to Reflection (Coleridge) 3
 Altman, Dennis 216–17
 American Psychiatric Association 17
 anal intercourse 61–62
 androgyny 187, 223, 231
 anthropology 10
 anti-censorship: feminism 9, 142–44, 145, 183
 animals, masturbation 33
Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia (Deleuze and Guattari) 116–23, 124, 127, 129
 Anzieu, Didier 206
 'Apollonian' 42
The Archaeology of Knowledge (Foucault) 152
 Asia: 'bakla' 221; China 10, 218–19; Indonesia 11, 219–21; 'lesbi' and 'gay' 219–21; The Philippines 221–22; sexuality 216–22
askesis 167, 174
 Australia: indigenous peoples 221
 autoeroticism: animals 32–33; Bloch 32–33; infancy 63–65; Irigaray 101–2; psychoanalysis 63, 70, 89; women 32, 70, 101–2; *see also* masturbation
 Barbach, Lonnie 51
 barebacking 213–14, 223
 Barthes, Roland 132–33
 Bartky, Sandra Lee 170
 Bataille, Georges 8, 110–15, 118, 123
 Baudrillard, Jean 127–32
 behaviourism, pornography 142–43
 Benkert, Karl-Maria 161
 Bennington, Geoffrey 126
 Berlant, Lauren 210–11
 Bernini, Giovanni Lorenzo 88
 bestiality, Krafft-Ebing 25
Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire (Sedgwick) 183–85
Beyond the Pleasure Principle (Freud) 107–9, 116, 123, 126, 133, 211, 224
 Birken, Lawrence 53–54, 56
The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception (Foucault) 152
 bisexuality: early use of term 2, 3; Freud 103; infancy 76, 78; naming 224–25; queer theory 186, 192, 194, 198, 202–3; Ulrichs 21–23; Weininger 36–37, 38
 Bland, Lucy 46
 Bloch, Iwan 13, 19, 25, 31–35; on Freud 33

- blood: AIDS/HIV 214; kinship 130, 162, 214; purity 162–63; race 163, 173; sacrifice 113–14
- body: body art 32; children 59–60, 77–78, 98–99, 157; desire 122, 124, 130; discontinuous 122; female 42, 46, 47, 51, 102, 103, 129, 137, 140, 147, 157, 171; Freud 67; homosexual 34–35, 37, 60, 161, 230–31; lesbian 47–48; male 44–45; maternal 75, 90–91, 99–100; medical gaze 152; organless 118–22, 129; parts of 61–62, 64, 209; racialized 173–74; sexed 21, 187, 189, 190–93, 203, 226; social 152, 157, 159, 201; transgender 203–9; *see also* penis
- Boellstorff, Tom 212–13, 219–21
- boi 223
- Borch-Jacobsen, Mikkel 86
- bottom 169, 200, 223
- Bowie, Malcolm 61, 83
- Breuer, Josef 58
- Bristow, Joseph 20
- British Medical Journal* 31
- butch 21, 47, 190, 192, 193, 200, 206, 209, 22; *see also* femme
- Butler, Judith 10, 226, 241, 188–96
- camp 224
- capitalism: Baudrillard 129–30; desire 53–56; family 54–56, 162; individualism 97; organless body 116–23; pornography 129–30, 135, 138; psychoanalysis 95, 116; 'Capitalism and Gay Identity' (D'Emilio) 54–56
- The Care of the Self* (Foucault) 165, 168, 171
- Carpenter, Edward 24
- Carter, Angela 146
- Cartesianism 70, 208
- case history, sexology 17–18, 28–29, 164
- Castle, Terry 47, 184
- castration complex 7–8, 60, 85, 121; boys 65–66, 67–68; definition 224, 226, 229; feminist views on 92, 93, 95; girls 65–66, 68–70, 73–74; Kristeva 99; pornography 146, 150; *see also* Oedipus complex; penis-envy
- cathexis 67, 101, 224
- celibacy: feminism 46
- censorship: gay literature 156–57; incitement to discourse 156–57; lesbianism 53; obscenity 148; pornography 154–55, 156–57, 159, 160–61; psychic 68, 99; *Sexual Inversion* (Ellis) 13–1; *The Well of Loneliness* (Hall) 19, 53; *see also* anti-censorship
- Charcot, Jean-Martin 58
- child abuse, Freud 73
- children: compulsion to repeat 108–9; Freud 60, 63–75; masturbation 157–58; primitives 173–74; sexual abuse 16, 73, 139–42, 172–73; sexuality 57, 64; *stade du miroir* (mirror stage) 77–79; surveillance of 157–58; *see also* puberty
- China 10, 218–19
- chora* 98–100, 102
- Christianity: marriage 26; ritual sacrifice 113–14
- Civil Partners Act, UK (2004) 14
- Cixous, Hélène 102–4
- Cohen, Ed 193
- Coleridge, Samuel Taylor 3
- Comfort, Alex 12
- Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain, from the Nineteenth Century to the Present* (Weeks) 179
- Communist Manifesto* (Engels and Marx) 159–60
- computers, seduction 131–32
- constructionism 170–71, 178–79, 187, 189, 190, 196, 224; *see also* essentialism

- consumerism: desire 53–54;
 pornography 106–7, 135, 138, 142,
 147
*Consuming Desire: Sexual Science and
 the Emergence of a Culture of
 Abundance* (Birken) 53–54
 Cornell, Drucilla 144–46
Course in General Linguistics (Saussure)
 81
 Cowper, William 3
 Criminal Law Amendment Act (1885) 14
 cross-dressing 35, 48, 192, 193, 221, 225
 cruising 214, 217, 224
- d'Anvers, Hadewijch 88
 Darwin, Charles 43
 Darwinism 18, 44–46
 Däumer, Elisabeth A. 202
 Dean, Tim 212, 214–15
 death: desire 8; homosexuality 183; life-
 and-death struggles 8, 104–50;
 pornography 138; *see also* 'little
 death'
 death drive: Bataille 111; Edelman 211;
 Freud 8, 107, 116, 224; Lyotard 123,
 126
 degeneration 162, 225
 Deleuze, Gilles 8, 116–27, 129
 D'Emilio, John 54–56
 Descartes, René 79, 208
*The Descent of Man, and Selection in
 Relation to Sex* (Darwin) 43
 Deutsch, Helene 90
 Dickens, Charles 183
 difference, sexual: feminist views of 97,
 144, 148, 170, 172; Foucault 155, 170,
 172; Freud 65, 101; Lacan 86–88
 Dionian love 20, 21, 22
 'Dionysian' 42
 disability theory: Siebers 200–201
*Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the
 Prison* (Foucault) 152, 170
 discourse 152–53; feminist views of 173,
 177–78; Foucault 152–53, 156–62;
 reverse discourse 160–61
- diversity, sexual 10–11
 Doan, Laura 49
 Donne, John 104, 106
 drag 192, 193, 200, 204, 225
 dreams: Freud 59, 66, 74; Lacan 79–80
Dreams (Schreiner) 44
 drives, sexual 17; *see also* instincts
Dusty Answer (Lehmann) 49
 Dworkin, Andrea 136–40, 142, 144
- Eadie, Jo 202–3
 Eagleton, Terry 174–76
écriture féminine 103
 Edelman, Lee 211
 effeminacy 21, 22, 181, 190, 221
 ego: definition 225; development
 90–91, 92; libido 110; pleasure
 principle 107; 'skin ego' 206;
 splitting 84; women 38–39
The Ego and the Id (Freud) 66, 67–68
 'Electra complex' 70
 Ellis, Havelock 14, 60
 Engels, Friedrich 159–60
Epistemology of the Closet (Sedgwick)
 185–86, 188, 194
 Equality Act, UK (2006) 14
Eroticism (Bataille) 110–15
 Erotomania (Krafft-Ebing) 25
 essentialism 10, 178, 179, 197, 204, 225
 eugenics 43, 46, 53, 162, 163
 evolution 32, 53; feminist view 44, 46
The Facts of Life (Porter and Hall) 52
- Faderman, Lillian 47
 family: alternative 213; capitalism
 54–56, 116; history 155, 157; white
 54–56; *see also* heteronormative;
 homonormative
 fantasy: pornography 138, 146;
 seduction 73
 'Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality'
 (Laplanche and Pontalis) 149
 fascism: eugenics 162–63;
 psychoanalysis 163; view of
 women 41

- Faust* (Goethe) 62
 Feinberg, Leslie 203, 204–5
 'Female Sexuality' (Freud) 71–73, 90–91
 femme 192, 193, 200, 209, 225; *see also* butch
 femininity: active 79; Baudrillard 128–31; feminist view 93–96, 100–102; Foucault 177–78; Freud 68–70, 71–76, 90, 93; labour 105; Lacan 87–88, 89, 91; molar/molecular energies 123; Oedipus complex 68–75; seduction 128–31; sex/gender distinction 189–91; socialization 143; transgender 204–7; Ulrichs 24; Weininger 36–37, 38–39
 'Femininity' (Freud) 70–72, 76, 95, 100
 'Femininity and Its Discontents' (Rose) 96–97
 feminism: anti-censorship 142, 144; Baudrillard 128–29; Foucault 170–73; French 122; Freud 89–98; heterosexuality 50; Lacan 87–89; molar/molecular energies 122–23; phallocentrism 8, 98, 100, 102, 178, 229, 134–35; pornography 107, 133–50; psychoanalysis 8, 91–104; radical feminism 134–40; sexology 43–52; socialist feminism 134; transgender 226
Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary (Wright) 91
Feminism and Psychoanalysis: The Daughter's Seduction (Gallop) 95–5
Feminist Review (journal) 95
Feminists against Censorship 142–44, 145
Femme Productions 150
 fetishism: definition 225–26; Freud 27, 62; Krafft-Ebing 27–28; moral hierarchy 181; sexology 13, 27–28
 Field, Michael 19
 Figs, Eva 93
 Firestone, Shulamith 93
First Principles (Spencer) 43
For Yourself: The Fulfilment of Female Sexuality (Barbach) 51
 Forster, E.M. 49
 Foucault, Michel 9, 150, 151–79, 182, 185, 187, 188, 189, 191, 192, 196, 212, 223, 225, 230
The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis (Lacan) 82
Freikorps 41
 Freud, Sigmund 6–8, 24–25, 33, 57–76; Autoerotism 63–64, 65; castration complex 60, 65–74, 224; death drive 107, 224; Deleuze and Guattari on 116, 118; femininity 70–76; feminism 89–104; fetishism 27–28; Foucault on 150, 162–64; Krafft-Ebing 24–25; Lacan and 76, 79–80, 82, 84–88; Oedipus complex 60, 66–75, 229; *see also* ego; id; repression; superego
Freud, Biologist of the Mind: Beyond the Psychoanalytic Legend (Sulloway) 93
 Friedan, Betty 93
 FTM (also F2M or FtM) 203, 226
 Fuss, Diana 75–76, 102
 Gagnon, John 16
 Galen of Pergamum 36
 Gallop, Jane 94–95
 Galton, Francis 43
 gay: definition 226
 gender: construction 142; definition 226; Foucault 170, 171, 173; norms 21; psychoanalysis 95–96
 genderqueer 226
Gender Trouble (Butler) 188–94
 Gilman, Sander 174
 Girard, René 184
 Gissing, George 19
 globalization 216, 217, 218, 220, 221
 Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von 62
 Gothic, desire and death 106
 Grand, Sarah 19
The Great Scourge and How to End It (Pankhurst) 46

- Greco-Roman civilisation 165, 167, 171
 Greece, ancient 165, 174, 175
 Grosz, Elizabeth 121–23
Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego (Freud) 86, 164
 Guattari, Félix 8, 116–24, 127, 129
- Hall, Lesley 31, 52
 Hall, Radclyffe 19, 47–49
 Halperin, David M. 5–6
 Hamilton, Cicely 46
Hard Core (Williams) 148–50
 Harvey, David 216
 Hegel, G.W.F. 81, 85, 99, 112, 159, 160,
 heredity: feminine modesty 27;
 homosexuality 30–31, 36–37, 65–66;
 Krafft-Ebing 31; masochism 30;
 psychoanalysis 6–7; sadism 30;
 Schreiner 46; sexuality 7;
 Weininger 35;
 hermaphroditism 22, 36, 160, 221, 226
 heteronormative 10, 210–12, 226–27
 heterosexuality: Bloch 35, 36;
 capitalism 55–56; death and sex
 110, 112, 115; definition 4, 224;
 early use of term 2; female 14, 30,
 45, 69, 70; feminism 50; Foucault
 153, 154–55, 158, 168; Freud 61, 62,
 63, 66, 68–70, 109, 110;
 heteronormativity 5, 210;
 ‘heterosexual matrix’ 192, 195, 196;
 male 28, 30–31, 66, 68, 69, 115;
 marriage 184, 211–13; moral
 hierarchy 180, 182; pornography 133,
 145, 146, 147, 149, 150; sex/gender
 system 190–91; sexology 13
 Hirschfeld, Magnus 34
The History of Sexuality (Foucault) 9,
 151–54, 160, 165, 169–79, 185, 188,
 192, 196, 230
*The Hite Report: A Nationwide Study of
 Female Sexuality* (Hite) 14–15
 Hite, Shere 14–15
 homonormative 227
 homophobia 55–56, 182, 184, 227
 homosexuality: and AIDS 35, 182, 183,
 194, 214; anus 61–62; capitalism
 54–56; as congenital condition 20,
 34–35, 60, 161; criminalization 14;
 definition 4, 227; discourse 160–61;
 early use of term 2, 4; Freud 57, 60,
 74, 75; gay subcultures 53–55, 168,
 200, 213; Hall, Radclyffe 19, 47–49;
 ‘The Homosexual Role’ (McIntosh)
 179; and homosociality 183–84;
 Krafft-Ebing 25, 30; male drag 192–93;
 mental disorder classification 17;
 moral hierarchy 180–81; pornography
 141–42; Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky 205,
 183–87, 199–200; stereotypes 21, 47;
 Ulrichs 20–21; Weininger 37–38; *see*
 also homophobia; queer theory;
 sexual inversion
 homosociality 183–84
 Horney, Karen 90
Human Sexual Response (Masters and
 Johnson) 50
 Hunt, Lynn 134
Hustler magazine 137–38, 145
 hypnosis, Freud 58
 hysteria, Freud 58
- Ibsen, Henrik 92
 id (Freud) 68, 110; definition 227
 Imaginary (Lacan) 82, 83, 98
 ‘imaginary domain’ (Cornell) 144
 incest 68, 112, 139, 162
 individualism 222–23
 Indonesia 10, 219
 inequality, Foucault 172–73
 instincts, sexual 17; *see also* drives
The Interpretation of Dreams (Freud)
 59, 66, 79
 intersexuality 23, 201, 203, 228
The Invasion of Compulsory Sex-Morality
 (Reich) 164
 Irigaray, Luce 100–102, 104, 122, 128
 Irvine, Janice 13
 Islam, marriage 26
 Itzin, Catherine 140–42, 143

- Jeffreys, Sheila 43
 Jews: Weininger on 40–41
 Johnson, Virginia E. 50
 Johnston, Jill 50
jouissance 87–89, 99, 102, 103
The Joy of Sex (Comfort) 12
 Joyce, James 99
 Jung, C.G. 42
- Kant, Immanuel 117
 Kappeler, Susanne 135
 Kendrick, Walter 134
 Kingsley, Charles 3
 Kinsey, Alfred C. 14, 16, 18, 50
 kissing, Freud 61, 62
 Klein, Melanie 90
 Krafft-Ebing, Richard von 4, 18–19,
 24–31, 161; Bloch on 25, 33, 34;
 Freud 65; Ulrichs 18
 Kristeva, Julia 91, 98, 99–102, 104
- labour: capitalism 54–56, 119, 130, 131;
 women 44–46, 54, 95
 Lacan, Jacques 7–8, 56, 76–89, 91;
 feminist view 96–97, 98; Imaginary
 82–83, 98, 225; lack 83–84, 87, 100;
 Real 83, 230; Signification 81–82;
 stade du miroir (mirror stage) 77–78,
 228; Symbolic 83, 85, 98, 99, 231
 language: Kristeva 98, 99; Lacan 76,
 79–81; LGBT and queer theory
 195–96, 197–206; transgender 205;
 see also discourse
 Laplanche, Jean 7–8, 93, 116, 149
 Lawrence, D.H. 37, 91, 121–22
 Lehmann, Rosamond 49
 LGBT, LGBTQ, LGBTQI 192–206
Lesbian Nation (Johnston) 50
 lesbianism: censorship 49; feminism
 43, 46; Freud 74–76; Hall, Radclyffe
 19, 47–49; Krafft-Ebing 25, 30–31;
 naming of 50–51; 197–98, 228;
 separatism 50, 187, 204; stereotypes
 180, 190; Ulrichs 21–22, 23; *see also*
 butch; femme; sexual inversion
- Libidinal Economy* (Lyotard) 123–27, 129
 linguistics: Kristeva 98–99; Lacan 79,
 81, 86; *see also* language; Saussure
 ‘little death’ 106, 133; Bataille 111;
 Freud 110; pornography 148; *see also*
 death
 Lydston, Frank 54
 Lyotard, Jean-François 123–27
- m/f* journal 91
 McIntosh, Mary 179
 MacKinnon, Catharine A. 138–40, 142
 McNay, Lois 176–77
 Mallarmé, Stéphane 99
 Malthus, Thomas 158
 Manalansan IV, Martin 221–22
 marriage: ancient Greece 166;
 capitalism 55; feminist view 46; gay,
 lesbian, same-sex 10, 221–13; history
 155, 162; homosociality 184; religion
 26–28, 182; sexual love 28; *see also*
 heteronormative; homonormative
Marriage as a Trade (Hamilton) 46
*Married Love: A New Contribution to the
 Solution of Sex Difficulties* (Stopes)
 12, 50
 Martin, Biddy 177–78
 Marx, Karl 123, 151, 160
 Marxism: Foucault 151, 153, 174–76;
 homosexuality 54–55; subjectivity 97
 masculinity: Bataille 115; Baudrillard
 128–29, 131; construction 178–79,
 189–93, 194; female 47, 70–72, 190;
 feminism 92, 95, 102, 103, 136, 147,
 148, 171–72; Freud 61, 63, 66,
 67–69; Lacan 87; Ulrichs 23–24;
 Weininger 37–38; *see also* butch;
 gender; homosociality; misogyny;
 penis; penis-envy; phallocentrism;
 phallus; pornography; transgender
 masochism: capitalism 53; Foucault
 169; Freud 62–63; Krafft-Ebing 28–30;
 sexology 6, 13; *see also* bottom;
 fetishism; sadism; sadomasochism
 Masters, William H. 50

- masturbation: Bloch 32–33; children 70, 72–73, 79–80, 175; moral hierarchy 200–201; pornography 147
- Mauss, Marcel 124
- media: advice 11; images 11, 217, 220–21; moral panic 182
- men: ancient Greece 5, 166–67, 171; aggression 27, 136–38, 142; castration complex 65–68, 145–46; envious of women 89; fetishism 28–29, 35; gay 14, 19–23, 34, 157, 168, 180, 183, 198, 213, 217, 219–21; Oedipus complex 66–69, 145–46; sexual response 141, 145–46; weakening effect of women 38–39, 41; *see also* gender; heterosexuality; homosexuality; masculinity; pornography
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice 207–10
- metaphor 80
- metonymy 80
- Miller, Henry 92, 121
- Millett, Kate 91–94, 122
- Minneapolis City Council, pornography ordinance 138–39
- minoritizing/universalizing (Sedgwick) 186–87;
- mirror stage (*stade du miroir*) 77–79, 82, 99, 228
- misogyny: homosociality 184, 227; pornography 138; Weininger 35
- Mitchell, Juliet 93–94, 95
- Moebius band 124
- moral panic 182–83
- morality, hierarchy of sexual acts 181
- Morgan, Robin 133–34, 136
- motherhood: eugenics 43; feminine power 44; labour 45; Weininger on 39
- murder, eroticism 106, 111, 112, 136
- My Father and Myself* (Ackerley) 4
- nature versus nurture 187
- Nazis 41
- neoliberalism 216, 218–19,
- Newton, Esther 48
- New Woman 19
- Nietzsche, Friedrich 42, 188
- nihilism, Lyotard 126
- norm 153, 180, 193, 195, 200, 210–13; *see also* homonormative; heteronormative
- nurture 187
- 'nymphomania' (Krafft-Ebing) 25
- Obscene Publications Act (1857) 134
- obscenity: feminism 134–35, 140; legislation 134
- Oedipus complex 7–8, 60–74; boys 66–69; definition 229; feminist view 104–5, 110; girls 60, 65–66, 69–76; phallus 85; *see also* castration complex
- organless body 119
- orgasm: death 106, 110; eroticism 6, 14, 50–51; pornographic representation 132, 133, 147; women 89; *see also* 'little death'
- Orlando* (Woolf) 49
- Other: Lacan 79, 81, 82, 84, 88–89; symbolic 99, 102, 112, 174, 214
- 'An Outline of Psycho-Analysis' (Freud) 58
- Oxford English Dictionary* 2–4, 134
- Paglia, Camille 41–43
- Pankhurst, Christabel 46
- A Passage to India* (Forster) 49
- pederasty, Krafft-Ebing 25
- penis 8, 62, 65–66, 69–70, 182, 206–9; phallus relationship 85, 87, 90, 101; pornography 136, 146, 147–48; *see also* penis-envy; phallus
- penis-envy 8, 90, 91, 93
- perversion: Barthes 132; definition 229; Foucault 160, 162, 164; Freud 61, 62–64; Krafft-Ebing 28–30; nineteenth-century sexology 6, 54
- phallocentrism 8
- phallus 8; Baudrillard 141; Cixous 103; Deleuze and Guattari 121; feminist

- view 146–49; Irigaray 101; Kristeva 99–100; Lacan 8, 77, 85–87; penis relationship 85; pornography 147–49; *The Phenomenology of Perception* (Merleau-Ponty) 207–9
The Phenomenology of Spirit (Hegel) 81, 112, 159
 Plato 20, 37, 98, 117
The Pleasure of the Text (Barthes) 132
 ‘plugging in’ 118
 political lesbianism 50
 Pontalis, Jean-Bertrand 7–8, 116, 149
 pornography 8–9, 31, 106, 133–50;
 Barthes 132–33; Baudrillard 129–32;
 capitalism 54, 107; censorship 135,
 142–44, 182–83; computers 132;
 feminism 9, 133–50; history 134–35;
 ‘imaginary domain’ (Cornell) 144–46;
 ‘money shot’ 129–30, 147–48; rape
 and violence 15, 135–42, 146;
 somasochism 141–42, 149
Pornography: Men Possessing Women
 (Dworkin) 136–38
 Porter, Roy 31, 52
 postmodernism 129, 203, 205
 Povinelli, Elizabeth 221
 power: ancient Greece 184, 185–86;
 body 196; desire 25, 54, 105, 114,
 118, 119, 120–21, 126, 128, 199, 212;
 femininity 129, 131; Foucault 9, 151–55,
 157–63, 165–67, 169–71, 173–78, 188;
 labour 130; phallic 136–39, 146;
 political 93; subjectivity 77–78, 86, 100;
 state 25, 141, 182; *see also* biopower
Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection
 (Kristeva) 110
 Proposition 8 (California, 2008) 212
 Prostitutes 29, 41, 115; Weininger on 39
 Prosser, Jay 206–7
 Proust, Marcel 127
 psychoanalysis 4, 6–8, 56, 57–104;
 Barthes on 135; Baudrillard on 133;
 Deleuze and Guattari on 116–17,
 119–21; dreams 59; feminism on
 89–104, 145–46, 149–50, 192;
 Foucault on 9, 151–54, 161–64, 170,
 176; Freud 57–76; Lacan 76–89;
 Lyotard on 124, 127–28; queer on
 211; Riviere 129; transgender on
 206; *see also* castration complex;
 Freud; Lacan; Oedipus complex
*Psychoanalysis and Feminism: Freud,
 Reich, Laing and Women* (Mitchell) 93
 ‘Psychoanalysis: Psychic Law and
 Order?’ (Wilson) 95
Psychopathia Sexualis (Krafft-Ebing) 4,
 18–19, 24–31, 33
 puberty, Freud 33, 57, 59–60, 65, 68,
 72, 74
 queer: definition 195, 229
 Queer Nation 194
 queer theory 2, 9–10, 153, 179, 194–96,
 197–215, 218
 race 19, 26, 32, 40, 43, 45, 144, 151, 163,
 174, 203; *see also* blood; evolution;
 eugenics
 rape: Bataille 113; Freud 92; Krafft-
 Ebing 25; pornography 133–35, 139,
 141–43, 204
 Raymond, Janice 204
 Real (Lacan) 82, 83, 230
 Reich, Wilhelm
 religion 26, 130, 164, 182, 205; taboos
 113–14; *see also* Christianity
 repetition-compulsion (Freud) 108–9
 repression (Freud) 59, 63, 74, 108, 113,
 128, 164, 230
 reproduction: feminism and eugenics
 43; heteronormativity 210–11; life
 and death 110, 112; psychoanalysis
 7, 57, 109–10
 resistance: Foucault 153, 158–60; queer
 199–200; psychoanalysis 63
Revolution in Poetic Language (Kristeva)
 98
 rhizome metaphor 121
 Riviere, Joan 129
 Rofel, Lisa 218–19

- Rose, Jacqueline 88, 96–97
 Rubin, Gayle 10, 179–83
 Russell, Diana E.H. 141, 143
- Sacher-Masoch, Leopold 28
 sacrifice, ritual 113–14
 Sade, Marquis de 106, 133
 sadism 5, 13; Freud 62–63; Krafft-Ebing 28–30; *see also* masochism; sadomasochism
 sadomasochism: censorship 141; definition 230; feminism 142, 149; Foucault 168–69; moral hierarchy 180, 182; pornography 142, 149; *see also* masochism; sadism
- St Theresa of Avila 88
 Salamon, Gayle 207–9
 sati (suttee) 39–40
 ‘satyriasis’, Krafft-Ebing 25
 Saussure, Ferdinand de 81–82
 schizophrenia, desire 106, 120–21
 Schreiner, Olive 19, 44–46, 54
 Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky 10, 183–88, 199–200
 seduction: Baudrillard 127–29; Freud 73; Riviere 129
Seduction (Baudrillard) 127
 Segal, Lynne 50–52, 146
 sex (definition) 1, 10, 230
Sex and Character (Weininger) 19, 35–41
 sex manuals 12, 50
 ‘sex-parasitism’ 45
 sexism: Baudrillard 128; Deleuze and Guattari 121–22; feminism 91–92; Foucault 170; Freud 62; heterosexism 55; pornography 135, 144; sexology 39, 43
 sexology 5–7, 12–56; capitalism 53–54; case history 17–18; definition 230; feminism 43–52
 sexual abuse: Freud 73; Foucault 172–73; pornography 106, 135, 138, 140, 142
Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male (Kinsey) 14
Sexual Conduct: The Social Sources of Human Sexuality (Gagnon and Simon) 16, 17
 sexual inversion 21, 230
Sexual Inversion (Ellis) 13
- The Sexual Life of Our Time* (Bloch) 13, 19, 31–35
Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson (Paglia) 41–43
Sexual Politics (Millett) 91–93, 122
The Sexual Revolution: Towards a Self-Regulating Character Structure (Reich) 164
 ‘sexual selection’ (Darwin) 43
 sexually transmitted diseases 16
 Shakespeare, William: homosexuality 23
 shame: Bataille 113; Bloch 32; Freud 63; Krafft-Ebing 26; queer 199, 202
 Shaw, George Bernard 92
 shell-shock, repetition-compulsion 109
 Showalter, Elaine 19
 Siebers, Tobin 200–1
 signification: Butler, 192, 194; Kristeva 98–99; Lacan 7, 76–83, 85–86
 Simon, William 16, 17
 ‘skin ego’ (Anzieu) 206–7
 slavery, African 40
 SM *see* sadomasochism
 social Darwinism 18, 44–46
The Social Organization of Sexuality 15–16
Songs and Sonnets (Donne) 105
 Sontag, Susan 138
 Soper, Kate 171–72
 Sophocles 68
 ‘Sorties’ (Cixous) 102
Speculum of the Other Woman (Irigaray) 100
 Spencer, Herbert 18, 43
 Spinoza, Baruch 122
 Stein, Gertrude 37
 Stoler, Ann Laura 173–74
 Stone, Sandy 204
 Stopes, Marie 12, 50

- The Story of an African Farm* (Schreiner) 44
- straight 199, 210–13, 215, 231
- Stryker, Susan 203–4
- Studies in Hysteria* (Freud) 58
- Sulloway, Frank J. 93
- superego 68, 71, 82, 231
- Symbolic (Lacan) 83, 85, 98, 99, 231
- Symonds, John Addington 4, 14, 20
- Symposium* (Plato) 20
- Tennyson, Alfred 183
- thetic (Kristeva) 98–99,
- Theweleit, Karl 41
- ‘Thinking Sex’ (Rubin) 179
- ‘third sex’: Carpenter 24; definition 231;
- Feinberg 205; Hall, Radclyffe 47;
- Ulrichs 21;
- ‘This Sex Which Is Not One’ (Irigaray) 111–12
- A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Deleuze and Guattari) 120–23
- Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (Freud) 33, 59–66
- Tiefer, Leonore 16–17
- Timaeus* (Plato) 98
- time: coincidental time 213; straight time 212–13
- ‘The Traffic in Women’ (Rubin) 183
- The Transvestites* (Hirschfeld) 206
- transgender 10, 35, 187, 198–99, 201, 203–7, 209, 231; *see also* cross-dressing; sexual inversion; transsexuality
- transsexuality 141, 180–81, 187 198, 200, 204–7, 209, 231
- Ulrichs, Karl Heinrich 18, 19–25, 33, 60, 161
- unconscious: Freud 6, 56, 58–59, 68, 74; Lacan 76, 79–80
- ‘Unisexual’ (Symonds) 4
- Unpleasure (Freud) 107–8
- Uranian love 20, 21, 23
- ‘Urnings’ 20–23, 34
- The Use of Pleasure* (Foucault) 165–66, 174
- Valentine, David 204, 206
- Venus in Furs* (Sacher-Masoch) 28
- violence: Bataille 111, 113; eroticism 106; pornography 134, 136–39, 141–46, 182
- Warner, Michael 198–99, 210–12
- Weber, Samuel 81
- Weeks, Jeffrey 5, 179
- Weininger, Otto 19, 35–41, 45
- The Well of Loneliness* (Hall) 19, 47, 49
- Wilde, Oscar 14, 19, 92
- Will and Grace* (NBC) 221
- Williams, Linda 146–50
- Wilson, Elizabeth 95
- ‘Womanliness as a Masquerade’ (Riviere) 129
- women: autonomy 54; castration complex 65–66, 68–70, 73–74; category 189–90; differences between 177–78; genitals 65–70, 101, 147–49; ‘hysterical’ 57, 58; labour 44–46; molar/molecular energies 122–23; motherhood 43, 45–46; Nazi view 41; New Women 19; Oedipus complex 69–75; orgasm 14, 50–51, 113; pornography 132–50, 182; rights 53, 54, 91; sexual freedom 50; sexual object 87, 114; stereotypes 39, 41–42; subordination 40, 128, 165, 170, 171, 182, 184; weakening effect on men 38–39; *see also* femininity; feminism; lesbianism; seduction; sexism; sexual inversion
- Women and Labour* (Schreiner) 44–46, 50
- The Women in Question* (Adams and Cowie) 91
- Women’s Liberation Movement 93, 128, 135
- Woolf, Virginia 49
- Wright, Elizabeth 91
- Yeast: A Problem* (Kingsley) 3